Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

JANUARY 1924
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W. E. Pence in his working togs

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Chief Engineer, Chicago Engineering Works,
Dept. 1749, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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L. L. COOKE, Chief Engineer
CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS, Dept. 1749
2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago

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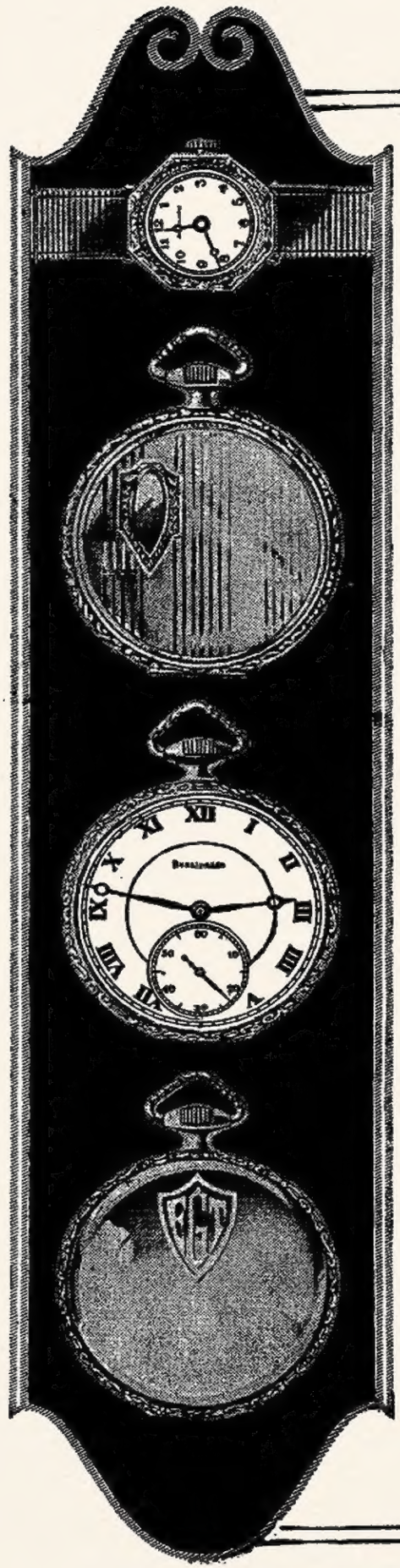

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An Absorbing Novel
About the End of the World

The Abysmal Horror

By B. WALLIS

BATSON was sitting on one of those infernal benches common to all English seaside resorts—long hard contrivances built out of one-by-four battens, painted brown or green, the color never varies, the architecture seldom. The seats and backs are built without the slightest relation to the anatomy of the human figure; however, tradition has proclaimed that thus were they ever made and thus shall they ever be.

Therefore, as the proper procedure of a holiday-making Briton, he was decently enduring the discomfort of one. It was past midnight, and, except for a few courting couples and himself, the esplanade was deserted. But Batson had to make the most of his fortnight of freedom. One week had already vanished, and in seven days he must return to London and the musty office where he had spent nine hours a day for the last eleven years, entering up ledgers at a salary of thirty-five shillings a week. By exhibiting a total disregard of his own tastes, comfort, and health, he had risen to and retained this billet. He realized his good fortune and was to a large extent contented.

Nevertheless, there were moments when he sensed that life had many highroads and by-paths which offered greater value for the barter of a soul. And that was just what he was thinking as he gazed absently over the black water.

The night was warm and the scene was monotonously restful. Probably in a little while he would have dozed. But fate decided that he should be one of the few to witness the arrival of the most momentous visitor this planet had ever known. It was just a flash, a streak of brilliant light, and it was gone. It came into view high over the black water and, rushing in an arc, passed overhead, speeding inland.

It appeared to him to be about equal to the size of the full moon, but as his eye followed its course he had the impression that it had become much larger before the retina lost the impression of that lightning-like stab.

"Crikey!" exclaimed Batson in an awed tone. "That's a whopper!"

Once in his irresponsible youth—he was now twenty-six years old—he had attended a short course of lectures upon Astronomy at the Polytechnic. He had been deeply interested, for in him were the seeds—though he never knew it—of that divine fire we fatuously label "imagination."

The monotony, the deadly poison of a meager assured sufficiency had stifled the growth and deprived him of the energy necessary to feed it, yet shreds of knowledge, gleams of that lost paradise remained dormant within him and now he knew that in a few hours many millions would be reading of what he had been the favored observer, for he realized that this was no ordinary visitor, and a certain emotion at his own eminence in being able to discount the morning papers —they did not arrive until the ten train —with their account of the Big Meteor, afforded him great satisfaction as he sauntered back to the boarding-house.

And that was the commencement of the strange and disastrous happenings which beset the world so shortly. Possibly a few hundred persons in the British

Isles shared with him the doubtful privilege of witnessing the arrival of this unique visitor, but certainly not one had a thought of the horror which it brought with it.

It was a meteor, sure enough, but of enormous proportion, far and away the largest humanity has any record of; so large that it might rank as a baby planet, one of those small dark bodies with which space is thought to be profusely peppered and which are invisible until they get well within the grasp of our sun.

Of course on that particular morning Batson overslept and arrived in the dining-room a good twenty minutes later than his fellow boarders. They appeared to be greatly excited and their interest was centered around some half a dozen copies of the *Brightsea Advertiser*.

"Here, Batson," cried an acquaintance (Dyke of Wakefield & Ruggles), "have a squint at this. You know a bit about these things, don't you?" And he handed him the sheet, which Batson at once saw was a special run out by the enterprising editor.

Where Dyke had gleaned the knowledge of his early studies he could not say. However, he was flattered by the publicity of the appeal and the sudden arrest of the clatter as all eyes were turned in his direction.

"Well, not a great deal; an amateur, you know," replied Batson modestly as he scanned the bold type and, suppressing his amazement, read:

"GIANT METEOR FALLS NEAR ROMNEY!

"DIAMETER THREE HUNDRED FEET."

"COUNTRY-SIDE ON FIRE! DOZEN FARMS VANISH!"

"Ah! I thought so," said he, with deliberation.

"Thought what?" queried Dykes impatiently.

"That something like this would happen," said Batson, shaking his head gravely. "When I saw that big chap go sailing by last night—"

"You *saw* it! Where! What was it like?" cried a dozen eager listeners.

"Oh I happened to be out late, doing a little star charting, you know, when this great brute came swinging along. Rushing, he was! Big as a house, and all a mass of red flames. I guessed by the line it was going it would fall somewhere around Romney way, and I tell you I felt mighty glad I wasn't living there. It was a magnificent sight; likely the world will never see such another. You missed something," he added in lordly regret.

During the morning the strain upon his inventive faculties was exhaustive, though a hasty scanning of the *Advertiser* gave him some pointers; the editor was a talented man in this direction and had let himself go; not often had a local sheet the chance to forestall the great dailies. These, when they arrived, were simply a mass of huge flaring headliners of the most startling nature, and the matter which they headed warranted the display, for it transpired that the descent of this unique arrival had been accompanied by a serious loss of life and destruction of property.

It had apparently descended in the curve of a speeding missile a few hundred yards south of the village of Rumford, there torn a gash in the ground a hundred feet in depth and many long, and from there it had bounded like a rubber ball for a half mile, erasing a third of the hamlet before rising clear of the balance, alighted again, dented another hole in the countryside, snuffing out a large farm in the act; and then, in decreasing leaps, had covered another two miles of farm land; leaving a trail of awful destruction in its wake preliminary to ceasing its activities.

It now reposed, a vast glowing incandescent ball in the extensive Romney marshes, which, in flat, water-sogged wastes, extend into the Thames estuary. So far as a hasty survey could be accurate, over five hundred persons had perished in this disastrous landing. Of this appalling number the greater proportion had utterly vanished, and the remainder were merely charred remnants burnt to a cinder by the intense heat of the passing monster.

Among these latter were the occupants of the celebrated Wyvenorth Hall, the seat of twenty generations of Wyvens; the direct and last representative with his entire family had perished and the stately Tudor pile had in a second become a molten furnace in the fiery breath of the giant as it almost brushed the walls in passing. Even now as it lay, with one-fourth of its vast bulk buried, it was impossible to approach within a radius of a couple of miles, and already for that space every house, every blade of grass, and every vestige of inflammable material had been consumed. And beyond this radius fires were hourly breaking out, the tremendous and sustained heat rapidly drying to tinder an ever increasing area.

It was estimated to be three to four hundred feet in diameter. All London was flocking to the spot and the railroads in that district had suspended their set schedules to send everything on wheels packed with excursionists of the vicinity. Autos, aeroplanes, ancient four-horse char-a-banes, costers with their mokes, on wings, on foot, on wheels, a vast multitude were pouring that way. Business had entirely ceased, workers in offices, stores, factories and docks simply laid down their tools and joined the black tide. A mania had taken possession of the populace to view this giant arrival from out of the depths of uncharted space.

The impact of its first alighting had been distinctly felt in the metropolis, the severity of the blow and the tremendous crash which accompanied it were at first thought to be of a subterranean nature and occasioned much alarm, but telephonic news from the neighborhood of the descent soon set the presses whirling and the "specials" broadcast the bare facts.

The excitement became intense and great crowds flocked the streets of the city. Primrose Hill, and the heights at Highgate and Hampstead were black with an eager, seething mass of humanity striving to obtain a view of the monster, for it was very clearly visible from these points as a brilliant rose-tinted, glowing disc which threw its radiance even upon the watchers themselves and paled the star spangled dome far beyond them.

An hour before dawn the main arteries leading to the marshes were packed tight with a jostling throng, and daylight witnessed a veritable stampede of unheard-of proportions in progress.

Hour by hour, the infection of that endless, hastening stream spread to the more phlegmatic, until they, too, found the urge irresistible. London was fast emptying; commerce had ceased as it had not ceased since the days of the great plague.

The wildest rumors and predictions were in circulation, proclaimed and accepted with conviction.

"The heat would destroy the city itself; the shock had deflected the path of our planet and we should be engulfed by the sun," and so forth. The authorities, alarmed at the total disruption of commerce, had endeavored to stem the tide by aid of police and military, but, short of actual warfare, no human efforts could prevail.

For two days this frenzy of unreasoning curiosity raged. Then such prosaic matters as a scarcity of bread, meat, coal, and the exposure to the elements of those earlier multitudes unable to force their return, asserted themselves. For the most sublime events cannot maintain their hold when confronted by hunger

and exposure. In those first two days there was no returning, hundreds of thousands had therefore been compelled to remain in the vicinity of the marshes, or move further abroad, but now, strong in numbers and desperation, these great masses drove their weight against the incoming stream and slowly brought them first to a standstill and then to a retreat.

Ever increasing in weight by a succession of frontal waves, retreating to save their lives, the tide turned and rolled citywards. By the third evening London had refilled and the "Great Stampede" was over, to be ever remembered as one of the most inexplicable manias which humanity has experienced.

A week later men still read the morning papers with a pleased interest, noting fresh data of the scientific bodies, minutely watching it with the complacency of parents observing the growth of their progeny. And dense throngs from all over the country still streamed to view in awe the glowing giant, which now had appreciably cooled and was in the dull red stage, although it was even yet unapproachable within half a mile.

For the last few days a providential spell of wet weather had held further conflagrations in check, and it was hoped that danger from this source was no longer to be apprehended. Batson, on his return to town—he refused to shorten his stay at Brightsea by a single day—made a Sunday excursion to the spot. He returned with his belief in the stability of our solar system badly wrecked. It certainly was an incredibly huge mass viewed on those flat marshes, and it entailed a strenuous effort of the imagination to picture the thing hurtling through space and eventually, after who could say how many years rudderless traveling, coming to rest not thirty minutes from his own doorstep.

A good three hundred feet it reared its visible bulk aloft—nearly a fourth was hidden deep in the muck of the marshes; its height, weight and composition were already common knowledge, and, so far as the latter went, differed only in quality from a similar sized section of our own planet, radium, gold, and nickel being largely in excess. Even on his visit two weeks after its descent it was still faintly red in the daylight and distinctly luminous in the night, and the heat at half a mile was quite perceptible.

"Lumme! She's a whopper all right! To think I was the first to spot her."

He dwelt for some time with much satisfaction upon the thought, though its veracity was not acknowledged by the correspondence the press received from a host of individuals with identical claims.

He returned to town, a thoughtful and expanded being. He could not detach himself from the majesty and awe of that lonely flight through cold, dark, incalculable space. Expert opinion was veering to the belief, however, that this was no wanderer of lengthy (in light years) duration, but rather was it more probable that, due to some stupendous convulsion, a fragment had been torn from some distant unknown world and hurled beyond the gravitational radius of its parent and had under the attraction of other bodies continued its course until, passing close to our planet, it had been captured and forced to alight.

That this should be its origin entailed, of course, an almost endless chain of miracles, but then so does the daily existence of untold heavenly bodies. In its flight through the lower strata of our atmosphere—it is a certainty that it encircled our world at least once, and probably several times at a great distance—it became plastic from the intense heat generated by the friction and, whatever its previous form, was moulded into its present globular shape. This transformation would take place probably between ten and twenty miles from the earth's surface, or, rather, it would commence then and culminate at a somewhat lesser height. And so, having learned all that the man in the street could readily assimilate, the great commonsense public later on shelved the incident and returned to its daily menu of crime and divorce.

Some two months after this unique landing our friend Batson, one Sunday, was stretched full length in the shade of a patch of gorse on Hampstead Heath. It was the last week in July, and the day was so sultry that even a most atrocious and minutely detailed murder was perused by him without much satisfaction. The paper he held was one of the great weekly editions which appear to be in wireless connection with every square mile of land and water from pole to pole. It is immaterial that he was smoking a cheap and nasty imitation Egyptian cigarette; also, that short paragraphs invariably diverted his attention from the more stately solid columns. In one of these digressions his eye alighted upon the following:

> "Hertzodwina, Bosnia.—A most extraordinary state of panic exists in the hamlet of Gorovitcha, the inhabitants of which are en masse migrating. The reason being, they assert, the presence in the neighboring mountains of an unknown plant growth which is possessed of locomotory powers and predatory activities. They maintain that two of their number have already fallen victims to this strange vegetation and others have had narrow escapes. While most probably the fatalities are due to entirely natural causes, exaggerated by ignorance and superstition, yet the affair has attracted considerable attention and the authorities have instituted an investigation. Gorovitcha lies thirty-five miles northeast of the capital. The country is wild and rugged in the extreme. Education is practically non-existent."

"Ignorant lot, I reckon," said Batson aloud. "Awful bosh. Queer, though, a whole village moving out; people like that don't leave home for nothing."

Unaccountably, his mind reverted to that paragraph many times during the afternoon.

On that very day two men, separated by many thousand miles, had barely escaped with their lives from dangers every whit as incredible as the item that Batson had read. And long into that night they sat relating to wondering and sympathetic friends their strange experiences.

One, a Sicilian fisherman, told with many crossings and expressions of gratitude to the saints, a story of being off a long rocky point laying out his lines for the fish which at low water swarmed there. He had cast out his lines and was waiting for the turn of the tide to test the presence of the shoal, as then the catch was the most sure. Waiting, he had drowsed in the stern of the boat. Drowsed until he was aroused by a gentle rustling on the outside of the craft, as though some object was passing underneath.

Thinking that a porpoise might be beneath the keel, engaged in scraping off certain marine parasites as is their occasional fashion, he leaned over the side, mildly curious. But all he could see was a mass of what he took at first to be a species of large ropelike sea-weed. Yet the dull green color and stout build of the stems and fronds were unfamiliar to him and attracted his attention. He described the fronds as being as long as his arm and nearly as thick, widening as they left the parent stem and with extremities which seemed to be curiously involved series of folds.

There was something fleshy and morbid in their appearance which was enhanced by their color, a dull, oily green. And as he gazed at the thick smooth stems a feeling of revulsion he could neither describe nor explain came upon

him. For a moment he gazed wonderingly; there appeared to be a mass of it, and only around the boat. Then he became aware that it was not the ripple on the water that was imparting a semblance of movement to the growth. It was a movement originating in its own mass. The ropelike stems were slowly twisting and thrusting their visible lengths from one side to another, and the fronds, too, appeared to be alternately retracting and elongating, though on the whole the motion drove the mass closer to the boat.

Beyond, he caught sight of two more similar masses which he had not previously noted. There was something very disagreeable in the sight and proximity of this stuff. Of course, Guiseppe was merely a poor, uneducated fisherman and could not express fully to his audience the complex mixture of curiosity and dawning distrust which possessed him at the time. But suddenly his curiosity vanished and his distrust changed to fear as he realized that every stem and frond were moving in toward the boat and a great number already alongside were gently tapping and striking at the planking, even raising their convolutions above the surface to do so. It was as though they were intelligently examining the craft.

Then the fisherman, thoroughly alarmed, relinquished his role of passive observer.

"*Madre a Dios!* I made one quick jump for the oars, but something tripped me and I fell all of a heap to the bottom. My leg felt as though a steel trap had snapped on it. I turn my head as I fall, then I see what it is that has hold of my leg and I know great fear!"

Which undoubtedly he did, for from the opposite side to which he had been facing a dull oily-green rope extended its length over the gunwale and to his leg upon which it had taken a turn around and back on to itself. It was perhaps no more than an inch thick, but it was as rigid as a wire cable and its grip on his leg felt like the bite of iron. Two fronds, probably attached to this stem, had half their length above the side and their blunt thick tips were in motion and had opened out in a rosette shape, exposing a wide orifice encircled by a series of little discs somewhat similar to these upon the limb of an octopus.

Guiseppe was a powerfully-built man, and just then a very desperate one, for he felt that the gripping cable was dragging him to the side, and at that moment another cable came softly sliding over the gunwale. By great good fortune the long heavy knife, which these men usually carry to eviscerate the larger of their catch, was lying within his reach. Without a second's thought, he seized this and, twisting round slashed with all his strength down on the gripping length. It was likely a blow which would have severed a man's head from his body, yet he had to repeat it before he attained his release and the greater part whipped back with a *whang* like a huge rubber band.

Two more lightning strokes he made at the other cable and still another which had arisen while he was freeing himself. These invaders he sliced apart with a single stroke for each. Then, seizing the sculls, he thrust them over and pulled with all his frantic might straight out to sea. Whether this move was unexpected or whether these injured strands had their origin all in one individual mass and the strange thing was temporarily vanquished, Guiseppe could not say, but the fact remains that there was no further opposition to his progress. The mutilated ends he swung overboard with the tip of his knife when he had placed a good mile between himself and the scene of the attack.

This, reduced to the essentials, was the narrative of Guiseppe, fisherman of Boggiacio Sicily.

Now we turn to the strange experience of Angus McAllister, shepherd of Ardgovan in western Argyllshire. Angus, though a rigid upholder and attendant of the U. P. Church, was well known to be no stranger to the wee drap that cheers, and also inebriates. Therefore, at the "Bonny Charlie" that night, while all were attentive listeners, there were many who more or less openly envied him the condition which they presumed had inspired his narrative; but others with Celtic leanings to the supernormal listened enthralled. Anyway, Angus was emphatic in his statement that the sheep might "rot" before he would "set foot again on that ungodly hill Ben Cruaich."

It was there that very afternoon he had been seeking some missing members of his charge. A black wild mass is Ben Cruaich; great precipices dropping bare and sheer to dark lonely pools. Low bushes, dwarfed and ungraceful, heather, and scrawny masses of unfruitful briars form the sole vegetation to be found in all its grim three thousand feet. Near the summit Angus came upon a couple of the wanderers, but they were through with wandering and they lay almost covered by a tangled mass of dried withered-looking stems. They lay at the foot of the northern precipice, which descends in one great step right from the summit for five hundred feet to the pool known as Ben's Cup; this is simply seepage held in check by a ridge of debris fallen ages gone by from above.

The pool is deep but small in area, barely half an acre in extent. Along its edges a dense growth of stunted scrub and trailing climbers secure their sustenance. Near the center of a patch of these latter lay the two animals.

That they were defunct was obvious, for their hide and flesh had been stripped from their under parts, giving them a sigularly shriveled, emaciated appearance. Angus was naturally both astonished and wrathful, as it was now some years since he had shot the last pair of Golden Eagles, and the district had been free of such marauders. Angus gave vent to several hearty Gallic and Anglo-Saxon expletives, for all that he attended the kirk so regularly.

Then a fact regarding the mutilated corpses caught his attention, and he stopped to consider its bearing upon the assassins. For the eyes in both remained untouched, and eagles, like all birds of prey, apparently regard these organs as an epicure does his larks' tongues on toast. The shepherd drew nearer and stepped into what he took, unheeding, to be simply the dead stems of a clump of brambles. As he forced his way through the tangle it seemed to him—he thought of this afterwards—that his passage communicated a tremulous motion to the whole mass.

He leaned over the nearest carcass and, using his left hand, took hold of a foreleg, intending to raise the body to examine it more closely. Then the thing happened which accounted for the condition of his coat and arm that night.

As he gripped and lugged at the leg a thin stem flicked upward and fell lightly across his wrist and, whipping over it very perceptibly, tightened itself to form a clasping bracelet. The incident was to Angus merely the rebound of a pliant stem from his step. Impatiently, he drew his hand back to free it. But his hand went back not one third of the space the energy expended should have taken it, for this withered-looking stalk gave the impression of suddenly contracting into itself, and not only checked the swing of his muscle, but unmistakably commenced to *draw it downward with a strong steady pull.*

He stared in astonishment. A touch on his leg caused him to glance down; several stems lay across his feet and were coiling around his ankles and (the motion was plainly visible) were moving in spiral fashion toward his knee.

Then he knew fear, the fear which is an inexplicable horror of the unknown.

He had no sort of conception or guess what this thing might be, but intuitively he knew that unless he got clear at once something awful would take place. He had no weapon, his thick staff he had dropped when stepping into the tangle. Underfoot, below the horrible stems, lay a rabble of sharp-edged stones, splinters from the heights above. In a frenzy, he thrust his hand recklessly between the stems and snatched up a triangular rock. The action was as instantaneous as the strike of a rattlesnake. Without a second's pause, he crashed the sharp stone down on the thing gripping his arm, heedless of injury to his person.

The thing reared its bruised, blunted end as though in menace, yet it still held its grip tightly. He rained mad blows upon it, shredding his coat sleeve to ribbons and severely cutting his arm. Suddenly it fell to the ground cut in two. Kicking and struggling with the strength of frenzy, he tore his legs free from the strands which had wound around them. With one wild leap, he had cleared the mass and was speeding up the steep slope which confined the pool on its lower side. As he reached the top, no more than fifty feet above the water, he turned and stared backward.

It seemed to him that the whole clump was nearer to him and further from the water than its original position had been, and its general outline appeared more compact and raised higher above the ground. Even as he stared, a single length, slightly ahead, deliberately raised its tip a foot in the air with a swaying sideways motion, as though something sightless was seeking some object.

That was the finishing touch for Angus. With a hoarse yell of terror, he swung round and tore madly down the dangerous slope of Ben Cruaich.

These two strange narratives, distortedly condensed, were engulfed by one of the great news services and through the medium of the Press thrust upon the ever avid public. Millions read the paragraphs, and promptly forgot them. Batson was one of these millions, yet his imaginative subconscious self would not admit of a complete sloughing of such items, and they lay dormant until occasion was propitious for their resurrection.

Such an occasion arose but a few days later. It happened in Windsor Park. Batson was a mildly inveterate cyclist; that is to say, he owned a cheap machine and on Sundays took it religiously abroad. He found a certain modest enjoyment in the outing; moreover, it gave him the sense and satisfaction of a duty fulfilled; his duty in contributing his quota toward the national prejudice in favor of physical exertion when divorced from the slightest chance of pecuniary remuneration.

The day was a scorcher and the shade of the park after a two hours run a fitting reward. Therefore by noon he was sprawled on his back under an aged oak. A small weed-grown pond lay a few feet in front of him. He was away from the crowd which chattered and bustled at least a quarter of a mile distant, for he had taken an unusual step, both for Batson and for a law-abiding Briton. Having with secrecy and caution scaled the fence of a large covert, he slid his machine over and carefully hid it under a bush, and then pushed his way through the wood until he came upon this secluded pond with its deep grassed shady banks and inviting peace. This entirely met his heart's desires; it was great to lie there, alone, and forget the grind of life.

He awoke slowly, unwillingly. He must have slept some hours, for the light had greatly altered and the shadows were long. Batson moved and yawned drowsily. He felt strangely heavy and disinclined to arise. He would have liked to lie there indefinitely. But the chains of habit were pulling; he had always made a point of negotiating the London traffic before lighting-up time, and now he would have to put the pace up a notch to accomplish this. He rose to a sitting position; he certainly felt very queer, weak and washed out.

It puzzled him: he had felt as usual when he lay down—sleepy and pleasantly tired, that was all. Something irritating and clinging attracted his attention to his wrists. His right hand lay yet in the long grass, buried almost to the elbow. His gaze fell on his left hand which rested now upon his knee. It was streaked with long meandering lines of red. He held it up and examined it closely: some little brown threadlike stalks, thin and leafless, hung from his wrist. They seemed to be attached in some mysterious manner to his flesh and each point of attachment was the source of one of those meandering red lines whose other end he now perceived slowly dropped red blotches upon his trousers leg. Those streaks were blood—*his own blood!* Dumbfounded, he gazed at his upheld, dripping hand and the hanging scraps of withered-looking rubbish. What the deuce did it mean? What had happened? He drew his hand closer; why, from the lower ends of the withered grasslike stems little red drops were forming, exuding from this stuff; and even as he gazed two completed globules detached themselves and fell heavily, with an audible splash, upon his clothes.

"Good lord!" exclaimed Batson, "they're drinking my blood!"

But they were so thin and insignificant-looking that he felt nothing beyond amazement and indignation.

"Some blasted foreign stuff these nobs have been raising," he muttered angrily, as yet too astonished to realize fully the extraordinary nature of such vegetation.

Then he became aware that his wrists were hurting him, a dull aching, akin to a rheumatic pain, possessed them, and there was a prickly tingling at his ankles—he was wearing low cycling shoes—and his attention was drawn to them.

The tall grass was here laid flat where he had moved in his slumber, and he could see that his feet and ankles were nearly hidden by a covering of these curious brown fibers, and for many feet around in and out of the grass he saw the ground was a mass of the stuff. He was certain that no such growth had been there when he first lay down. He stooped, forgetting for a moment the clinging things around his wrist, and became aware that the slender threads were connected to dark reddish-brown tuberlike things about the size and somewhat the shape of a small hen's egg, though irregular in outline and rough of surface; and they were moving! Moving with a motion which suggested that their filaments were cables upon which they hauled.

A sudden gust of revulsion and fear swept over him; he lifted one foot with its clinging tangle and brought it down viciously upon several of these tubers gathered closely together. The comparison of treading upon a monstrous and very soft slug flashed over him as from each side of his canvas shoe there shot a spirt of heavy red liquid which stained the dust-soiled cream of his shoe with ugly dark red blotches. There could be no doubt but it was blood, *his* blood!

Then, as with the men whose narratives he now suddenly and oddly recollected with a dawning comprehension of the association, a quick unreasoning fear fell upon Batson.

"Here, I've had enough of this blasted stuff! It's alive!" he exclaimed disjointedly, and tore the clinging threads from his wrist and experienced a disgust on finding that they felt in his grasp as though he had clutched a handful of soft slimy worms.

The stuff came away easily, and where it had been attached the blood welled out in heavy drops. Shuffling one foot against the other, he rapidly scraped his feet free and then, white and scared-looking, he made off at a pace that was

practically a run. He uttered never a word until he reached his machine. Bundling it and himself over the fence, he stopped to take a breath and, looking back with a long frightened stare, he muttered, "Crikey! Eating me up!" mounted his wheel and made off at a rapid pace for the eastern entrance.

Now these happenings, coming so closely together, and, moreover, in an off season, attracted more attention from the Press than otherwise might have been the case. For Batson had at once written a carefully composed and altogether unintelligible account to the editor of the *Daily Telegram*. This epistle had immediately been passed over to a cub reporter with instructions to "fix it up." This youth returned with a story and a conviction that it was a good story. The *Telegram* ventured the thing and featured it.

It took. The public, attuned to marvels by the advent of the Giant Meteor, ate it up with gusto. Windsor Park in a twinkling underwent an influx of humanity that staggered its custodians. But that particular spot where Batson had met his weird adventure was ringed by constables; the authorities, upon perusing the account, had with prophetic acumen requisitioned the available local force and wired the city for assistance.

The officials, with a small force of attendants, made an immediate inspection of the spot and to their amazement discovered that the account in the Press was entirely correct. For they came upon the growth now enormously multiplied and extended so that it covered an area of nearly a quarter of an acre; whether one or innumerable individuals, they did not endeavor to ascertain, but promptly with scythe and bill-hook they shortly had the queer repulsive-looking stuff reaped and in piles and, with the assistance of a liberal drenching with coal-oil, fiercely burning.

Then, with mattock and shovel, they turned the ground over and spread a coating of unslaked lime over all. As a good steward, the head ranger's action was commendable, but in the sight of science it was an execrable sacrilege. When Kew finally received the official sanction to investigate not a vestige could be found. But the unavoidable leakage from the assistants and the emphatic affirmation of Batson constituted a base of proof which could not be ignored or overridden.

Then commenced the reign of the scientific and pseudo-scientific writer in the daily press. Explanations and theories were let loose upon the public by the score, to be quickly discounted by the characteristically restrained utterance of the great Botanist-Biologist, Sir James Tybhouse—the celebrated introducer of Balsae Tybhenus, a most economical substitute for silk—who advanced the supposition that this and other more remote cases reported of strange growths might possibly be connected with the recent visitor from the depths of space. As he remarked in an interview granted to *Nature*, it was conceivable that this fragment cast forth by some unknown planet might have come to us not at all altered from its original condition carrying its freight of dormant seeds only awaiting a favorable environment to quicken. When it encountered the uppermost strata of our atmosphere though infinitely rarefied immediately every movable object would be swept from its surface before the friction reduced it to a plastic incandescent mass.

These particles, though following their parent for a while, would eventually drop behind and descend upon our globe. Life in such a planet might be hardly translatable into terms which we could comprehend, yet the basic factors for all growth, heat and nutrition, were here. Of course, in problems such as this one could never attain to more than a logical deduction of the probabilities, yet it appeared to him, etc., etc.

Coming from such a source, this opinion fired the imagination of the public and quickly became accepted as the only plausible explanation of these extraordinary growths. Hardly was the print of this interview dry when the Dorking tragedy sent a thrill of horror through the British Isles, and from being a scientific curiosity the matter was in a single morning transformed into a deadly menace to countless lonely homesteads and hamlets. For on the outskirts of this old-world slumbering country town a woman and her little girl, straying on the great waste moorland there, had been done to death by these terrible invaders. Mere bloodless shells, they had been discovered lying amid a tangle of the growths at the bottom of a little secluded dell in a lonely part of the heath. The child still held in her baby hand a bunch of wild flowers not yet withered. The growth was identical with that encountered by the Ardgovân shepherd.

A crowd of inflamed townsmen had immediately proceeded to the spot and, falling upon the stuff, had with scythe and fire obliterated it. This time, however, a government expert was on the spot before the destruction was completed and secured a collector's-case full of fragments of the stems and their appendages. While mere unrelated fragments, they yet formed a solid base for biological deduction; and it at once became known that a totally incomprehensible form of life had arisen in our midst, partaking of both vegetable and animal attributes.

Science could only describe its structure and hold in suspense any estimate of the physiological functioning. Even yet the point is a source of much envenomed controversy among the savants. That they were capable of some slight attachment to the soil and might secure a portion of their nourishment therefrom was possible, as a series of filaments at the base of some of the stems appeared to indicate; yet the stems themselves were distinctly of animal structure, being, in fact, canals of assimilation with walls of immensely tough gristle. The appendages were more complex feeders of these stems, possessing a nucleus of striated fibres very suggestive of sensory nerve material.

Externally they bore several orifices hidden by a folding membrane. Within each of these lay a hollow tapering tube of hornlike composition, about an inch and a half in length and sharpened to the edge of a lancet. Inside this tube lay the lancet itself, a thin blade of the same horny substance. The function of these organs was obvious; a more efficient and deadly weapon for rending a victim and absorbing its blood and finely divided flesh could not be imagined. In short, the stems were grasping limbs of cablelike strength, and the thick fleshy appendages were the rending and masticating organs, probably also sensory centers of narrow limits. The fragments of the tuberous bodies they were known to possess were of too slight a nature to constitute a base of evidence of their anatomical structure; their cellular composition being quite unlike any living tissue hitherto known.

These were the broad lines of the investigation and as much as the general public could understandingly absorb. The complex detail with which minute research invested the fragments, and eventually constituted a literature of its own, belonged solely to the devotees of science. But one thing was certain: humanity had a new and extremely dangerous enemy to face; to what extent, only the powers of these strange things to multiply and adapt themselves to their new environment could tell. That the various governments took a grave view of the visitation was at once apparent, for strenuous efforts to exterminate these growths were at

once instituted by a definite concerted program of offense, national and local authorities combining with great energy in their efforts.

Warnings and descriptions were placarded all over the country and substantial rewards for their discovery were offered. Organized bands of searchers were detailed to scour the more remote and sparsely peopled districts; such as the great moors in the north and west, the lonely mountainous stretches of Wales and Cumberland and in many another waste spot.

And yet, as the days went by, the things increased and extended the area of their occupation in an ever-ascending ratio. Italy, Hungary, Spain, in the South; Normandy, Holland, Belgium, and the British Islands in the North, reported daily the spread of the things in spite of the vigorous efforts to suppress them, their growth, apparently, once they obtained a foothold, being as spontaneous and incalculable as a mushroom.

Daily the occurrences took on a more serious aspect and in place of their former complacent curiosity a vague uneasiness came upon the people; and men like Batson asked one of the other:

"These things now—getting rather thick, aren't they? Might wipe out a lot of cattle, eh? What's the Government doing? Time they woke up; that's what I think."

Still not one in ten million had as yet come into personal contact with the invaders; even such insignificant things as Batson had encountered, of which by the way, not half a dozen reported occurrences were known. The real awakening of England came three days after the Dorking tragedy, when in the wild rugged stretch between Llanfair and Dinas Mowddy in mid-Wales a farmer, with his entire family, had been enmeshed by a huge colony of these terrible things and most horribly perished.

The farmer, one William Owen, his wife and two small children had been on their way home from a friendly sing-song at a neighbor's that evening, and where their path dipped into a little bridged dell, in the dusk without the least warning, they must have walked straight into the stuff. The man had put up a great fight—as evidenced by his torn apparel and the bruised condition of his remains where the terrible stems had sunk deep into his flesh in the struggle to retain their prey. Possibly by himself he might have made good his escape, but his family were hopelessly entangled, so, like a decent man, he died with them.

A gasp of amazed horror throbbed through the masses when they learned the details. It appeared to them that an organized band of cold-blooded assassins had invaded their country, and neither man, woman, or child, from now on would be safe from their ferocious cunning. Certain political parties made capital out of the intense emotion which pulsed the nation at this pitiless wiping out of a whole family. The party in power came in for a scathing attack, charging incompetency and even criminal indifference to the security of its citizens.

The country was in an uproar and a general election was imminent when the disaster of the Grimsby trawler, the *White Wing*, turned the unrest of the people into a raging passion for instant revenge and action, so that politics were forgotten and both parties joined hands in planning some means of effective offense.

The *White Wing*, in full sight of the fishing fleet, had been suddenly surrounded by what observers affirmed had the appearance in the failing light of being large masses of floating weed. At the hour, shortly before lighting up the fleet had most of their dories out baiting as is their custom, though the weather was rough and a gale impending. On board the vanished craft one man and a boy had been left in charge. Finishing their task, the dories were in the act of making for their respective craft when the attention of the nearest men was attracted to the *White Wing* which was perhaps about half a mile distant.

The wind was from her to them, and quite plainly could be heard loud shouting and cries for aid. Resting on their oars, in astonishment they perceived that the vessel had undergone a sudden and extraordinary change. No longer the trim, clean-lined vessel they all knew, now she bulked in ungainly greater outline with a covering of what looked like a vast dark-colored matting hung in festoons and ridges from gunwale to water. The men stared, transfixed with amazement, and then, seeing the *White Wing's* two dories were speeding at racing pace to their transfigured home they, too, swung around and pulled lustily in the same direction, and at that moment the shouting abruptly changed to the screaming of men in great fear and peril.

Probably at least a quarter of a mile separated this last boat from the two belonging to the *White Wing*. That space was their salvation. Their course lay at an obtuse angle to the other two; by slightly turning their heads, they could clearly distinguish the field these two covered. And what they saw was the little craft go bobbing over the choppy sea until they had reached maybe within fifty feet of the strangely draped smack, and then something happened, so quickly that the watchers had hardly time to stop the way of their own dory before the thing was over and the two little bobbing craft had vanished.

Though the light now was fast failing they had seen the two boats suddenly stop, though the men were still straining at oars which hardly moved an inch as the water around them arose in a dark-hued heaving mass, arose and in one swift gliding movement flowed over the gunwales, and a single terrible scream of fear came to the paralyzed watchers. Then there was nothing more heard or seen. The great dark blister subsided and there was neither men nor boats, only the bare choppy sea, gray, and desolate. And then the gale which had been brewing abruptly broke upon the speechless watchers in one tremendous squall, and only by the instinctive action of mariners in such circumstances they swung around in time to escape being swamped, and with great difficulty made their way back to their own home craft.

But as they had swung around they had unconsciously noted that the *White Wing* as she heeled over to the blast seemed to have lost much of her incomprehensible drapery; and that is the last they or any one else ever saw of her. Whether she sank in that squall or later in the severe gale it was impossible to say.

From that day it dawned upon the world that the long established order of human domination was in jeopardy, and a new phase, a threatened return to the long past elemental struggle for mere existence was at hand. Neither land nor water now acknowledged the painfully acquired supremacy of man. New and enormously powerful factors had arisen which might well reduce civilization to a parlous state, if not entirely erase it from our planet. The masses turned in clamorous bewilderment to the governing bodies and demanded that men of science and action should replace the time-worn traditional politicians: with commendable self-abnegation and demand was immediately met. In Britain men of science took the initiative in the urgent conferences at Downing Street and administrators listened humbly to their counsels.

Extensive preparations—so far as men could prepare for the unknown

future—were hastily got under way to combat what the savants predicted might descend upon humanity at any moment; an influx of these alien forms of life upon a scale inconceivably vast. For they realized by the wide area of their operations that the late tragedies were but the sporadic actions of the van of the host rapidly engendering, and a mere hint of their incredible powers of multiplying and adapting themselves to their new environment.

In such an uproar was the country that this reorganization was rushed through without an hour's delay, spurred to feverish haste by wireless reports from a hundred varied sources at home and abroad telling of fresh and more serious outbreaks on land and water. And so went by the last few days of July.

The first of August saw the commencement of the hottest month ever known in Northern Europe, an August which would have lived long in the memory of man even had it not proved very nearly the final month for the entire human species. The thermometer registered absurd heights and the northern nations gasped and panted. Day after day the mercury crept up and up, 92°, 94° and then with a jump to 99°, which it may have held for ten days or even thirty; for from the fifth day of August the people ceased to take the least interest in the matter and it is doubtful if even any records were kept. For by the end of the first five days of the month the world had become panic-stricken with the horror of the fate confronting it; which was nothing less than the abrupt cessation of all traffic by water and the fast approaching extermination of every edible form of life upon our planet.

Probably the abnormal temperature was the immediate cause of the almost spontaneous and undreamt-of extension of the invaders. The first news of the outbreak was from the island of Corsica, and the wireless message came on the fourth day of the month and was merely a bald statement that the island was encircled by an extraordinary belt of what appeared to be a giant species of seaweed. This was in the early dawn and likely the operator's own conception of the phenomenon; for a little later came a more urgent message, a pressing plea for advice and aid from the civic body of Ajaccio, the capital, who were obviously alive to the fact that this was no mere unique drift of harmless weed.

Yet so little did they grasp the real nature of the menace that they simply lamented over the possible effect of the invasion upon their main vocation, the sardine fishery; and urged that aid be afforded the island to disperse the vexatious growths. On the top of that plaintive appeal arrived a rush of excited reports of like conditions from the great ports in every part of the Mediterranean. But these were messages of senders who understood the gravity of the menace, and they had with hastily-requisitioned and powerfully-engined vessels essayed to destroy the stuff by charging full speed through and through the incoming swelling belt.

As at Corsica, the drift had made its appearance in the early dawn as a line of apparently drifting seaweed about two miles distant from the coast and from that time rapidly increased in breadth toward the land, vast hordes rising in a continual stream to the surface at the well defined limit of their first appearance. The offensive adopted was entirely futile; the short channels the craft ploughed being immediately closed again by submerged thousands welling up from the depths, and shortly the vessels employed were solely occupied in endeavoring to extricate themselves from the trap in which they found they had become entangled.

After the impetus of the charge became exhausted it was discovered that even the great engines could make no headway against the densely packed mass ahead; arrested, their screws thrashed and churned the tough growth to pulp, yet ever more and more slowly, until finally they stopped, choked by the dead weight and gristly strength of thousands of entwined limbs. A few escaped, the majority remained hopelessly embedded, their crews staring in silent consternation at the writhing ceaseless movement of the enormous drift.

This happened late in the day; thereafter certain messages came through which the authorities for a little while suppressed; though from that moment a thousand wireless warnings flickered to a thousand incoming craft, urging them to make all speed possible to port, but at all cost to hold a good offing when in sight of land until notified further. Fast torpedo craft and racing launches shot out from a hundred widely spread ports around the British coast to speak vessels lacking wireless fittings; and other grim vessels of war steamed out to sea with more militant instructions.

The dawning of the fifth day of August justified the mad haste of the preceding hours. Before the sun blazed its full circumference above the horizon it was known to the nation that their country was in the act of being isolated and shut off from the trafficking in foodstuffs so necessary to their existence. There could be no reason to doubt that the progress of the invasion would duplicate that of the other countries affected. The great crowds holiday-making at the coast resorts in the vicinity of the larger ports were aroused by the continuous crashing detonations of high explosives. Rushing to the sea-front, they had strained their eyes into a thick white mist which each day lay upon the ocean until the rising sun dispersed it, to be replaced very shortly by haze of heat almost as dense.

At this early hour the field of vision was too restricted to permit of sighting the initial thin line of invaders. With Anglo-Saxon commonsense, they returned to their breakfast—household stocks held out for several days—and, hurriedly gulping whatever the early hour afforded, trooped back to the front. By now the mist had somewhat cleared and the crashing reports, freed of their smothering blanket, came more loudly to the ears of the watchers in their hundreds of thousands at Margate and Ramsgate, and rattled the windows ceaselessly.

The fifth, as many will recollect, fell that year upon a Sunday, and Ramsgate with a normal population of under twenty thousand, housed that day well over two hundred thousand. Always a popular resort of week-end trippers, the abnormal heat had not lessened its popularity. Among this great squeeze was Batson, who, with fifty thousand others, had availed themselves of the cheap Saturday to Monday excursion, all immensely excited by the messages of the vast invading hordes in the south, and the likelihood that any day might witness a similar eruption in England's home waters.

Batson, with a natural aptitude for worming his path through crowds, before long found himself at the pierhead; later the press in the rear made the performance impossible for anything larger than a weasel. Already—it was barely eight o'clock—the glare and power of the sun's reflected rays upon the water was almost unbearable. The day promised to become the hottest yet, and land and sea fairly throbbed with the swelter. Though the mist had vanished, a fast gathering blur of heat was settling as a veil, which shortly would bring the horizon even closer than it had been.

But for the moment the incoming horde was clearly discernible. Moreover, the serpentlike band was much broader, and by just so much the nearer; so rapid

had been its increase that now it had attained to nearly half a mile in width, and the rumor went round that from the Bristol Channel to the North Sea it extended in one unbroken vast line.

Inert and innocuous as it appeared in the distance, the great crowds staring at that enclosing belt from many a town and village along the southern coast felt a throb of pulse and a catch at heart as they realized the countless millions of these strange growths which must lie even within their restricted field of vision. Though the last staggering news from Southern Europe had not yet been made public, they instinctively sensed that the awful and unique tragedies, isolated though they were, hinted of unknown horrors and terrible possibilities connected with the approach of such an enormous and seemingly intelligent invasion.

An hour passed and the huge drifting line was obviously increased. And the increase was more rapid than at the commencement of the vigil.

The haze now was thickening upon the water; vessels large and small loomed up in the distance as blurred outlines and uncertain masses, hovered for a little while, then, with sudden speed, faded into nothingness. The roaring reverberations of the exploding bombs crashed by incessantly, for now the news had gone round of the vigorous offensive measures in progress in the attempt to destroy or divert the things in the vicinity of the great shipping centers. Hundreds of 'planes were raining bombs on the drifting growth and huge-engined war craft were also being employed in cruising up and down the outer fringe, flailing the myriads with thrashing screws. Millions of the things were sliced to ribbons, and in the slimy swirling wake of each hard-driven vessel appeared ever a denser press of the endless stream of indomitable life.

Warned by those suppressed messages, the vessels held to the fringe and so avoided the fate which had overtaken those enmeshed foreign craft. Yet one was not to escape, and the terrible tragedy occurred in full view of Batson and the crowded sea-front at Ramsgate. Out of the shrouding haze came at a forty-knot clip the lately launched Destroyer *Ariadne*. Fifteen hundred tons and fifteen thousand horse power, she embodied the last word in marine inventive genius. She slipped through the water almost hidden by the wave cast up from the knifelike edge of her racing stem.

Pulsing with vibrant resplendent life, she shot into view, and without a second's pause swung around in a sharp curve, dashed into the stupendous horde, striking it a slanting blow, and penetrated several hundred feet. To the astounded watchers it appeared as though she had suddenly rung off her engines as she scraped over a submerged sand or mudbank, for her bow was observed to rise high above the water line with a sharp mounting motion, hang suspended for a second and then plunge downward as if she had surmounted the obstacle. A few declared that she moved a little way succeeding this convulsion, but to the majority that strange upward fling was her final effort.

How it happened that this unaccountable move was taken never came to light. Whether it was merely the impulsive action of a rash hot-headed man, an error in the transmission of commands, or a defect in her steering gear can never be proven; no man ever learned the reason of that disobedience of implicit orders issued but a few hours earlier. Of her complement of one hundred and fifty-four officers and men not one returned. From where Batson stood the *Ariadne* was some two miles distant and the haze blurred all detail. Many had glasses, but they merely enlarged the smudge without exposing further particulars.

But Batson could distinctly discern the simple fact that in the vicinity of the motionless craft the dark belt appeared to darken as though the crowding millions were rising above the surface. Which must have actually been the case, for shortly it seemed as if the vessel was resting upon a low-lying islet which grew in stature even as he strained his eyes in amazement at this inexplicable phenomenon. A flash of vivid flame shot from the ship's side! And then another and still another. The boom of the first explosion came crashing by.

"Good lord, they're firing!" said Batson to his neighbor.

"Yus, wot they gettin' at? Guns ain't no good agin that stuff," replied his cockney neighbor.

"I reckon not; queer, they're at it again," exclaimed Batson as the vivid flashes broke from her side again. "I wonder—surely it isn't possible—" he muttered excitedly.

"Wot ain't possible; wot you torkin' abart?" queried his neighbor impatiently.

"Well—that stuff out there. Suppose it was big and strong enough to be dangerous to a ship?" replied Batson thoughtfully.

"Wot! that bloomin' weed! Rush the British Nivy! No bloody fear. Might hurt a biby, but couldn't do nothing agin the Nivy. You tike my word on that."

And as he spoke the wireless on the *Ariadne* was crackling its message to the naval craft miles away in the Thames estuary: "*We're caught. Send a 'plane with bombs, quick! This stuff is rising alongside—in mounds. Millions of them—arms twenty feet long.*"

Within fifteen minutes a buzzing 'plane was hovering over the spot. But the *Ariadne* had vanished five minutes after the message had gone forth. Batson and the crowds on the front had seen the islet as a dark blotch rise from the water, rise until the blurred outline of the *Ariadne* became shapeless and unrecognizable, and the firing ceased as the hill born of the ocean towered higher and higher, quickly reaching to several times the height of the hidden vessel.

Aghast and speechless, the crowds saw the great mound abruptly subside from the peak into itself, flatten, hollow out saucer shape; and then once more there was only the smudgy drab of the unbroken level of the awful growths.

"My God!" muttered Batson.

The man by his side still stared in silence; the expression of a puzzled child on his rough features. Then, close by, a woman screamed, a short hysterical note. The cockney shivered and found his voice:

"My Gord! Gorn! Like me steppin' on a beetle! 'Ere, wot is this stuff?" he turned on Batson and demanded fiercely.

"I dunno—rightly, that is. No one knows," he replied weakly. "They say it came on the 'Baby' (The people had so christened their giant visitor). Seeds they were. Blown off away high up. But no one knows rightly what they are—maybe they're animals, maybe plants. Anyway, they're terrible things—kill everything that comes their way—got some sort of a brain, too. I tell you, we're all in the soup—likely wipe out the lot of us."

This supposition was purely a personal opinion and by no means as yet commonly held. For a little while hardly realizing the terrible and staggering nature of the horrible tragedy they had just witnessed, the throngs on the pier excitedly discussed the inexplicable disaster; being strangely consoled by the unanimous assumption that some unspecified personage would be severely dealt with.

Then, abruptly, these in front became aware that the incoming horde had advanced considerably while they had been settling this matter. It might not be so very long before the van would be brushing the massive granite blocks below

them. A sudden hush fell upon the crowd as they grasped this fact. A lurch, more of a throb than an actual movement of muscle, sped through the tightly-packed mass.

"'Ere!" exclaimed the cockney addressing those in his immediate rear: "You blokes go back. I'm off 'ome, I am. These—will be 'ere soon, and I ain't goin' to be—not after seein' wot they done out there. Get back, you bloody fools!" he shouted as none stirred, it being impossible to do so.

But in an instant the man's words were upon a hundred lips:

"Get back! Get back! They're coming!" Men shouted, women screamed the words. Panic took possession of the crowd. Arms with tightly clenched fists rose above the swaying crush, rose to descend with maniac force upon the faces of those in the line of retreat. Cursing, blaspheming, men fought to kill; and women tore with fingers rigid as claws.

Beside the insanity of panic there lay the added horror of being hurled over the unprotected edge of the pier, and who could tell what fearful things already lurked unseen in the depths? In their desperate struggles to retreat from the edge, the crowd swayed from side to side and at every swing some poor wretch was swept over the side to fall screaming and frantically clawing at the smooth stonework as he went. Gradually, from the landward end of the pier, the people now aware of the fearful struggle going on ahead, opened out, and while the van of the horde was still many hundred feet from the pier it was vacated.

How many perished in that panic will never be known. At the time, except to the individual, it was quite immaterial; merely a trivial incident in the great ocean of disaster which had flooded the world.

Batson—for fate had extricated him—returned to town, stretched flat on the roof of an ancient third-class carriage; for though the railroad officials were powerless to enforce the regulations, yet the low-pitched English tunnels compelled, at any rate, a humble posture. Luck again was with him. After that Sunday night traveling was for the time strictly prohibited, the authorities fearing a wholesale migration to the great inland centers and a consequent emptying of the rural and producing districts.

That hundreds of thousands were separated from their families and placed in a deplorable plight had not the slightest weight with the cold, acute brains now in absolute power. To these men the individual was non-existent. The rationing system, crude as it was, provided the bare necessaries of life to all alike wherever they might be.

Batson, like most Britons, had the home instinct strongly developed and returned to his rather frowzy room with a sigh of relief; here, anyway, were the old familiar things pregnant with the spirit of the old order.

He had not a duty or a task to execute, for all private business had abruptly ceased. He had already registered at the local office; save extreme youth and age, the whole nation had been conscripted, the experience of past critical periods—sadly bungled at the time—now facilitated the prompt prosecution of this work. There would be no bungling this time or sentimental pitfalls. Implicit obedience or instant drastic punishment was the flat for all.

The streets were thronged with restless eager crowds, restless from ignorance, eager for news. From bulletin board to bulletin board they wandered incessantly. The press had orders to display immediately all news censored by the authorities, and huge blackboards had been hastily erected high up on the fronts of their establishments. As Batson wormed his way from Fleet Street to the Strand, where a nest of the great dailes have their offices, a sudden hush fell upon the crowd. He was too distant to decipher the large chalk words which the men on the staging were inscribing, but, close by, an adipose, well-dressed individual, possessed of a pair of field or opera glasses, delivered the message to his neighbors as each word appeared. In a clear educated tone he read out:

"New York, appearance of the weed in West Indies, Central America and Panama Canal reported beset, huge hordes pouring in, way completely blocked. Aeroplanes using explosives, endeavoring to destroy Canal and stop communication with Pacific. So far unsuccessful. Drift extends from Greenland to Florida, rapidly increasing. Marseilles, France, all craft caught in Drift Saturday have been sunk by weight of growths swarming on them. France, Italy, Spain, in hands of anarchists, terrible battles and casulties have occurred."

Such was the writing on the board, the merest outline of the vast tragedies being enacted. It was noteworthy that the crowd listened silently and later wandered off in little groups, conversing thoughtfully. The blow which had fallen upon the world had rocked the base upon which humanity had for thousands of years built its progress. The dominance of the human species had never once, since the earliest of pre-historic days, been questioned, nor in that gap had a doubt ever troubled humanity that it might not emerge victorious from every conflict with antagonistic life. And now the millions were anchorless and mentally paralyzed by the shock of the discovery that, after all, civilization might only be an insignificant and ephemeral phase of the evolution of our planet.

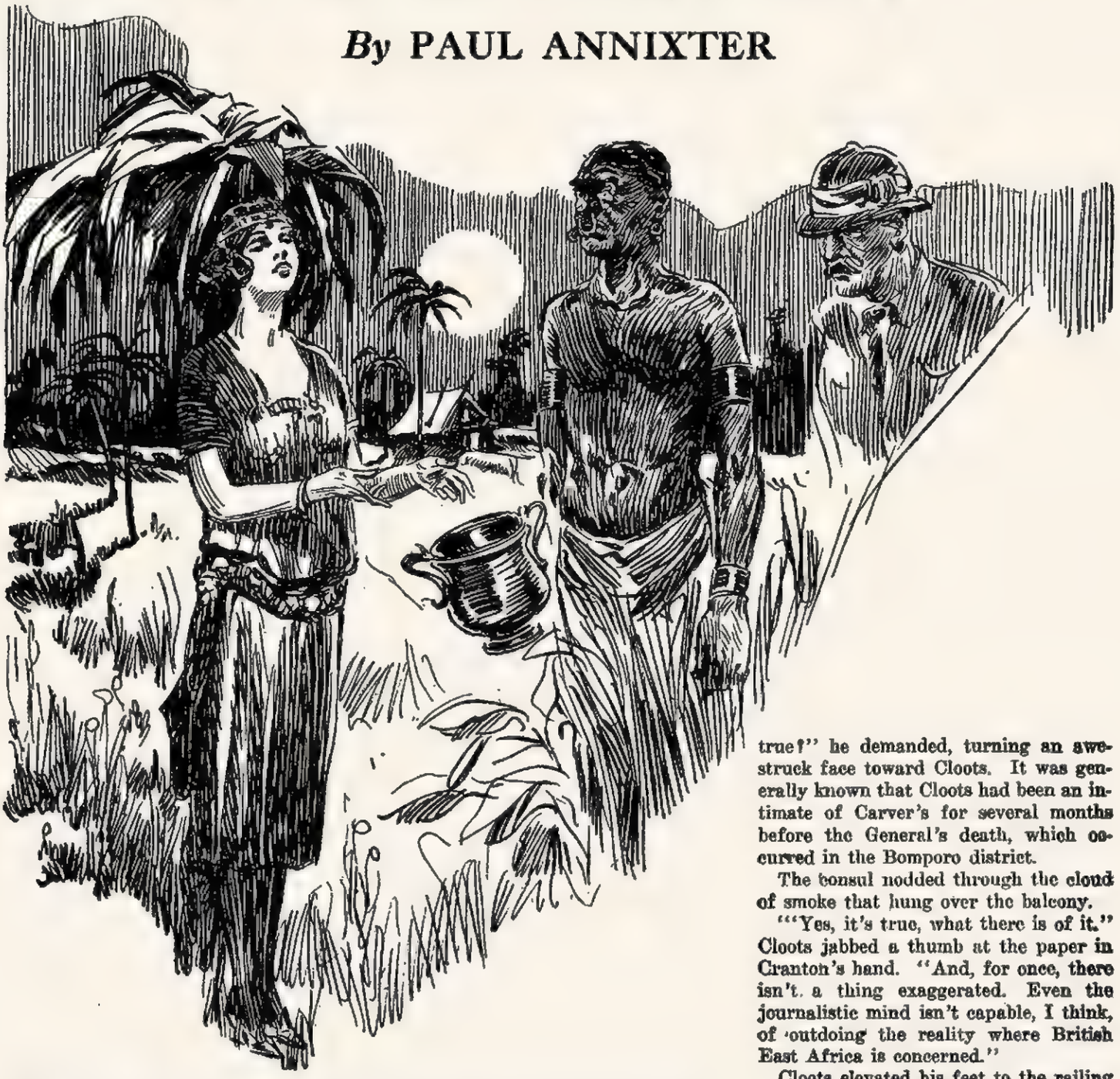
The heavens were rocking and gods falling. The great majority were incapable of readjusting their basic convictions and would pass away unconvinced that the human species merely endures so long as conditions are favorable.

This Remarkable Story Will Be Concluded in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES. In the Final Installment It Rushes Forward to an Amazing Climax. Don't Miss It.

A "Goose-Flesh" Tale of African Mysticism

BLACK SORCERY

By PAUL ANNIXTER



FOUR white men sat on the upper balcony of the Palace Hotel in Mombasa. It was early in the evening, a hot and sticky night of the kind which abounds on the African East Coast.

There was Cranton, a young subaltern, only six months out from Canada; Cloots, the consul, down from Bomporo, lean as a cheetah, and tanned to the color of yellow-bronze; Behring, the fat government clerk of the Mombasa office; and little Watts, an ivory-trader from the Interior. Young Cranton had just broken the after-dinner silence with an ejaculation over the month-old follow-story of the strange death of General Carver, the eminent British ethnologist, which filled almost the entire front page of a Liverpool paper that had come in that afternoon.

"You mean to say that all this is true?" he demanded, turning an awe-struck face toward Cloots. It was generally known that Cloots had been an intimate of Carver's for several months before the General's death, which occurred in the Bomporo district.

The consul nodded through the cloud of smoke that hung over the balcony.

"'Yes, it's true, what there is of it." Cloots jabbed a thumb at the paper in Cranton's hand. "And, for once, there isn't a thing exaggerated. Even the journalistic mind isn't capable, I think, of outdoing the reality where British East Africa is concerned."

Cloots elevated his feet to the railing wearily, and exhaled a cloud of cigarette smoke. Down below them, Mombasa, city of strange delights and moral obliquities, teemed with night-life—streets full of queer hotels, queerer shops, strange faces and tongues. Overhead the punkahs creaked softly and the talk along the gallery ebbed and flowed.

There were all manner of people from back home—youngsters like Cranton, just starting out, with all of health and

life to squander; old East Coasters, many of them going home, with the final goal either won or lost; a few officers' wives wilting in the humid heat. Cloots paid no heed to the life about him. His eyes were lost for a space on the deeper blackness that was the palm-fringed shores of the mainland, less than a hundred yards from the promenade that loomed below them.

Young Cranton read the last part of the follow-story aloud, and emitted a long-drawn whistle. General Carver was known at least by sight or hearsay, to each of the four. The manner of his death was in violent contrast to his staid and bigoted life. The General had sacrificed himself on the altar of knowledge, so the paper had it; his decease following a slow mental break-down caused by overwork and a touch of tropical sun-stroke. This, however, was hardly compatible with the queer rumors that had leaked out.

"Of course," Behring led out, turning to Cloots, "it wasn't sun-stroke, was it? You know the whole story, I suppose. If you don't mind, old man, we're all deuced curious."

"Oh, I'll tell you," Cloots said, a bit savagely, "thought I do want to forget the whole thing. It won't hurt me to speak—once. Perhaps it will help me forget; relieve me of some of the responsibility."

Watts and Cranton drew in a bit closer, expectantly. The consul lay back in his chair a few moments, puffing reflectively, as if he would gather in the trailing strands of memory.

"I have always thought it was fate that first brought old Carver to British East," he began. "I felt it from the first, and I was in a position to feel it, being part of the web of circumstance into which he was flung. If it wasn't fate, why should he have chosen Bomporo, of all places, to write a scientific treatise in? What else, too, could have possessed him to bring that beautiful daughter of his out here to the Bush, to run the risk of sleeping-sickness, blackwater fever, and the bite of a thousand and one flying and crawling things, to say nothing of the black sorcery of the Coast?

"Of course, you all know what brought Carver down here originally. Government sent him out to study the primitive savage in his native environment, to investigate his rites and habits, photograph him, study his talk, and measure his skull and toes—in a word, to give the jogging British public some ethnological data on their benighted jungle children.

"Four books in all he made, of what could have been done in one small volume. And of all the drivel ever concocted about the Dark Continent! Such genius for blundering into the very arcana of the romantic and the esoteric and failing to read any but the superficial into them, has perhaps never been known before. I think if Carver had come upon the center of all mystery he would have tried to analyze it in terms of science. The world is full of Carvers—all your prying little investigators are off the same block.

"Back home, he occupied somewhat of a pedestal, as you know; was rigid, irreproachably orthodox, and given to public philanthropy and the like. His main trouble was that he never could see Africa as anything but an extension of Chatham or Kensington. He should have been protected for his daughter's sake at least, but Carver's kind develops barriers, integuments of the brain that repel all friendly intercession. So all-sufficient they imagine themselves, these little intellectualists, and yet so puny in their aloneness. But it's not for me to hack up his memory now. Peace be to his bones."

CLOOTS paused to light another cigarette as a mosquito guard.

"Let me give you a picture of Bomporo where I've been stationed for the last two years," he went on, after a moment. "It's up on Tortuga Bay, a hundred miles north of here. It really isn't a bay, just an overgrown cove—so that the town is a sizzling little Tophet, shut off from the real sea sweep, hemmed in on three sides by the Bush, endless and smothering.

"It affects the settlement—barring all the finer things. You know what I mean—a white man there is engulfed, as a polyp engulfs its food, by the predominance of the blacks. Everything on the reverse, the touch of Europeanism only adding decadence and complication to the otherwise simple animalism of the native.

"I said that Carver's death was fate; and I say that Bomporo's throw-back is also fate—dating back to the days of the Portuguese slave-trade. There are remnants of the old slave baracoons there still, all along the rotting beach, and the feel of them is terrible. You get it by night especially, and the niggers won't go near them after dark. They have tall tales of cries that are heard there in the dark hours. God knows what manner of bloody work was enacted there in the old days.

"Try to imagine this barbaric backwater as the stopping place for a beautiful English girl like Jane Carver, fresh from the glowing limelight of half a dozen London seasons. Carver must have been mad, or drunk with his idea of the all-powerfulness of British suzerainty.

"I was the only white there at the time. I had a dozen or so Hausas to keep up a semblance of order, and a couple of nigger clerks, that was all. The nearest white woman was a hundred miles away, the nearest white man perhaps eighty. Plently of half-whites, but they are worse than the blacks.

"I was down to meet Carver and his daughter when they came ashore. They were just up from Zanzibar. I remember vividly our walk up Bomporo's only street that day. It took four carriers to manage Carver's boxes and paraphernalia.

"Carver was about fifty, partly bald—bulky and choleric, a fine product of the generation that is passing, his very presence associated itself in the mind with English beef and plum pudding. His manner was bombastic, and he apparently radiated health and vigor, but it was the sort you can buy from a masseur, as any man of the open could have seen. His kind of constitution usually spells dropsy or quick wasting-sickness for the tropics.

"The daughter was of a different stamp, but no woman was ever meant for the East Coast. The two of them treated their coming as an outing. I remember the glint of eyes peering out from behind lattices, the throaty chuckle of African women as we passed along, and Miss Carver's shudders at the looks turned upon her. I reassured her as best I could, telling her not to blame the 'yellow boys'; they hadn't seen a white woman for years.

"Of course, they had to put up at my bungalow. Carver spread himself proprietarily over about two thirds of the place the first day, in his characteristic way. The whole of that evening we talked, or rather I listened to him talk. I had exactly the feeling a clerk in a small branch might have on receiving a visit from Headquarters. A voice—raised in continuous and unvarying hortation—that is my lasting impression of him.

"He talked of ivory and rubber and other mammoth projects in the interior; of Empire and 'our colonial possessions,' leaning back in his chair, head cocked to one side with a heavy, judicial calm that was astounding, appalling. But mostly he talked of his work—his treatises. He was not to be shaken off; but I could stand it, for I had spoken with no one from the outside for a year.

"But the daughter—"

Cloots paused a moment; a softer note crept into his voice, and his eyes were lost in the shoreward blackness. The fat Behring noted the tone and was about to make a jesting remark, but refrained at the new look in Cloot's face.

"The daughter was a true thoroughbred. I shall never cease to marvel at her. From the first I did not look upon her as kith or kin of Carver's. She was twenty-five, tall and rather cold, as to approach, I thought, but there was a lot of sheer caliber to her and I was not long in finding it out. She had a cameo-like beauty of the sort that hurts a maverick like me deep down, the first glance—it's so perfect. Tranquil was the word for her; eyes of a fighting blue, deep and level of gaze. I suspected that she was like her mother.

"I did not take to Jane Carver at first. I doubt if anyone would have. But later, the father having dwindled about as far as he could for me, I began to see the depths in her. I read steadiness in her distant manner; endless surpassing in her noncommittal silences. You couldn't remain blind to the handicap that twenty-five years of life under Carver's wing would entail upon one, and it didn't take me long to see that that seeming sullenness of hers was caused by knowing too much about the particular lares and penates of her father's house.

"After the General had settled down to gargantuan labor on his final treatise—the greatest of the lot—each new one was to be greater than all the others—Miss Carver and I became very well acquainted. It came by slow degrees, an impersonal, comradely relation. Before, I had had little chance to speak with her, for when Carver was present no one else conversed except in stilted and unnatural phrases. But out from under his wing, I found her unexpectedly human and companionable. She was a person of really splendid and vital emotions and strong personality, all of her suppressed through a delayed youth. Naturally, as she opened up, she began to have a most potent charm for me.

"The first few days she told me how Africa had always called to her—how she had known for years that she would come here; how she loved it. The Old Mother, she called it. She didn't seem to see the squalor and nigger-litter of Bomporo; her imagination was away, compassing the country in all its untameable vastness, its ruthless savagery. She had a little dream about Africa's being the original cradle of us all, the fount of races, and believed that civilization had its first beginnings here. And dashed if there wasn't something to it. Look at Egypt, Carthage, Lemuria. Wasn't it Pliny who said, 'All things have come out of Africa?'

"She knew our history better than any East Coaster I ever brushed up against. When she talked, it wasn't of little wars and incidents; she was steeped in the ancient lore of the land; she dreamed of the days of Arab Kings and black-skinned Timoors; of the ancient walled towns of the desert, full of savage luxury, falling under the Mohammedan tide from the North. She made me see that there were other Africas than this steaming coast of ours, and that they were all a romantic and composite whole. She had an intense yearning to penetrate the Interior. She wanted to know, to see all this for herself. There was something almost shocking about her fierce intensity on these things.

"As I have said, she had delved into a lot of ancient writing; had heard, most of it exaggerated, of the great secret societies of the desert, of the esoteric rites of the Dahomans, and the Senoussi, and of the mysteries of bush fetish. She was full of the dreams and she wanted the tangible proof, and I guess you know the danger of that sort of thing to a neophyte in the country."

WATTS and Behring emitted knowing murmurs of corroboration, and young Cranton tried to look wise.

"There was little I could do," Cloots went on, "except to warn her. I could only hope that old Carver would get his fill and leave—before the virus got too far under her skin.

"There are ways and ways in which Africa claims her tithe of the hated invaders. Drink, women, black-smoke—those are only the lesser devils. It's the deeper, subtler ways that are deadly. They begin invariably with that craving to penetrate her esoteric side. Your average Britisher, with his armor of smug complacency and his ideas running in fixed grooves, is generally safe; but let a man be too psychic, too open on the imaginative side—then look out.

"I had been on the inside of too many cases like that, so the first week, much as I hated to, I went to her and begged her to go out, to get back to Zanzibar or Mombasa.

"'I don't care what you say,' I argued with her. 'This is no place for you, Miss Carver. Your father had no right to bring you.'

"'And I don't care what you say,' she would answer. 'I'm going to remain. I don't see how you can dictate to me. You men preempt all the adventures!'

"'There's just this,' I would counter. 'I've been down along this coast for ten years, and I know that no white woman or child should stay in Africa a moment longer than they can help it—especially when they feel as you do, Miss Carver.'

"There really wasn't anything more to be done. No use trying to make the General see it.

"The days drifted by, and while Old Carver ground out his canned knowledge, the girl and I progressed most famously. We did the town, after her inhibition had worn away, and the detachment with which she braved the scornful looks and the poisonous emanations of hatred from the black women, was a thing good to see. There was a native boat moored down at the end of the beach, and in it we penetrated for miles up a jungle estuary that crawled down to the sea.

"Sometimes we had the evenings together, too, when Carver didn't victimize us with his latest dredgings on the craniology of the Kroo. You fellows will appreciate just what it all meant to me—a chain of uninterrupted days with a young woman of proper age and attainments—after two years of life-in-death down there."

"Right-o," said Behring, with emphasis.

Cloots paused for several moments; and when he resumed it was with a sort of biting terseness.

"Everything might have been all right, had not trouble turned up one day in the shape of a Kroo medicine man from the Interior. The first I knew of his presence in the vicinity was when Wafa, my personal boy, came back from town one night with a new charm done up in a little skin bag and fastened to the hole in the lobe of one ear. He was grinning all over and explained to me that the charm was to ward off devils and bring about his speedy marriage with the high-priced and much-coveted daughter of the village head man. He had paid a month's hard-earned wages for it, to Channa, the 'big, big ju-ju of the Setta-Kroos,' who was encamped in the jungle just outside the town.

"I knew what that would mean, for I knew Channa. I had seen him before. The man was dangerous, an adept in the original and primitive black-art of which Africa is the home. His reputation extended even to Korobed, on the edge of the desert. Channa was and still is, what might be called the big political boss of British East. He wielded more power than a chief or a governor.

"I had an idea of what would happen if Carver got wind of the beggar's presence. I knew he'd never rest until

he had witnessed a bit of black man's magic first-hand. I had a bit of power with Channa, and determined to find him at once and keep him off by threats, force, or money.

"Half way down the street I was called back to sit court in a tribal squabble which kept me palavering the rest of that morning. Before I could get away again things had taken the turn I had feared.

"You know how it is up along the coast when delegates come in from the Hinterland for a few days. The jungle wireless gets busy, the tribes for fifty miles around talk to each other in an unknown code with loud boomings of telegraph logs, and there is a tension felt even among the Old Coasters.

"I had heard some of this during the morning, and when I hurried back to Headquarters I found Miss Carver all breathless with excitement. She informed me that her father had just left for the camp of Channa, that he was going to get some real first-hand information on West African Voodooism and ju-ju, and that he would possibly take her to see the witch-doctor later, or try and persuade Channa to make an appearance in town for her benefit."

"GOOD Lord!" exclaimed Behring. "I begin to see it now." There was a depth of understanding behind the words.

"Exactly," said Cloots. "You begin to see what Carver was butting up against—something that represents Mother Africa herself—the formidable side of her that teems with deadly, veiled antagonism against all whites and will continue to do so to the end of time. I saw it all in one evil flash; Carver was the very epitome of the thing that all Africa hates, and Channa was the embodiment of that hatred, its cunning and cruelty. They would clash as antipodal atoms clash. And the girl—

"'I am so deeply interested in all this—you could never understand just the way I feel,' she was saying. 'It's what I've been waiting for, I think. I've seen so much of the surface of things here, all the way down the coast—and nothing of what lies beneath. And all the time the part that's hidden, that means Africa to me—something ancient and pantheistic—has been calling. Do you understand? I can't be satisfied as a tourist is, with just the surface of things. Oh, there is something very deep, like a blood-memory, between Africa and me. When I feel her secret atmosphere, so mysterious and antagonistic, and sense her immense, empty distances, there's a lump in my throat and I feel a yearning that is wordless.'

"Yes, the magic name of Africa had spun a spell about her; she was brave and romantic and adventurous, and the whole of her craved a departure from the commonplace as a drowning man craves air.

"I didn't try to explain to her. I saw that it was useless. I watched for Carver all the rest of that morning, but it was past mid-day before he returned and with him was Channa, the witch-doctor. I saw the two of them coming up the street from the jungle, and hurried down to meet them, full of vague misgivings. Can you imagine them coming along between the rows of grass huts, the pompous and beefy Britisher, side by side with the gaunt and sinister figure of the medicine man; the one strutting and immaculate, the other half-nude and gliding easily with the sensitive footing of the jungle man.

Channa was a full-blooded Kroo from the Uganda country, with the high cheek-bones and narrow, villainous face of his kind. Unknown to consort with a white man before, mistrusted by Europeans and feared by the blacks, his seeming intimacy with Carver gave me a qualm. Channa halted; Carver came forward, bawling out a greeting full of exuberance, yet dignified.

"He explained to me that there was to be a genuine ju-ju show out in the jungle that night, and that he was going out to see it. He must have that at all costs for his chapters on Voodoo mysteries. Hitherto the subject had not received proper attention. He was going to take a camera with him on the chance of getting some choice flash-light pictures, he said. There would in all probability be ghost-dances and blood sacrifices."

"The infernal ass!" cried Watts.

"At that moment I became aware most keenly of the witch doctor's eyes. They were leveled at a point just back of my shoulder, and, turning, I saw that Jane Carver had come up behind us. She was flushed and radiant and had just started to say something to her father, but her words had fallen flat and she stood now as one transfixed, returning the medicine man's stare across the intervening space—which was perhaps twenty or thirty feet.

"For four or five seconds they stood thus, an occult combat of eyes and wills. I felt the force of the thing; Channa's gaze bridged the distance like a physical touch. I felt his damnable magnetism rolling out in waves. I imagined I could *see* it. It rose and rushed down upon her in a solid wall; I saw her shaken from head to foot, then she seemed to rally deep down, and struck through the thing, coming out, as I thought, victorious, as I leapt to her side.

"The incident was over; Channa stalked past us and on up the street. He did not turn his head again. Miss Carver was taking short quick breaths and her eyes were very bright.

"I ordered the two of them gruffly to come up to the house at once. Then I took Carver aside. Call it nerves—but I tell you I knew too much about Africa that afternoon, and a weight of dread was upon me as I looked out at the jungle and thought of all that lay concealed beneath it. The two of us had it out, hot and heavy, as I had expected. I told him of men who had gone out into the jungle as he was planning to do and never came back. I threatened to lock him up, threatened him with expulsion by the first steamer, if he persisted in meddling with ju-ju.

"A smile slowly spread over his face as I talked. It broke into a snort of contempt that was the hardest of all the things I had tolerated in him.

"'You're a very decent sort, my man,' he said, 'and you've helped us a great deal, but I don't believe it for a minute when you say these things can't be done. I think, sir, that you've been sitting at your desk is this God-forsaken hole so long that you've lost the knack of tackling a live thing. I'm going out there tonight, sir, with a flashlight camera and a couple of pistols in spite of all the consuls on the Coast. It's a chance in a million; they've promised to let me witness an initiation. In fact, I've already paid over a bally ten pounds for the privilege. Some of these black boys will go along with me.'

"'With *us*, father,' said a voice at my elbow. 'I'm going to go with you.'

"Jane Carver had come in and she stood erect and determined, her eyes glowing with that trance-like fascination that those months of thinking and dreaming mystery had bred in her. There she was, defying me, backed by her father and all the force of his bull-headed confidence and ostrich-like complacency. Can't you see it? The unseen finger of Channa was already laid on Carver's pulse. I could imagine him finally allowing himself to be won over, seemingly by the General's impressive words, after long and dignified palaver.

"Right then was the time for me to act, if ever. Yet something withheld me, and I say again that what followed must have been meant. Before I could influence them, the girl, too, had turned the thing into something like an issue of

courage. I saw that no power of mine, short of physical force, could stop her, and that would never cure that craving of hers.

"A swarm of unexpected and unbidden pictures swept through my mind, and with them came a new and poignant pang in my breast. I discovered at that moment just how much that succession of magic days had meant to me. I realized that I'd actually been dreaming of a future in which Jane Carver figured, forgetting my forty years, half of which had been spent mavericking about the world's odd corners. What a fool a man is. Anyway, everything in me wanted to serve her then, and right there I decided to see the thing through, to cure her for all time of that lure-of-Africa thing."

"MISS CARVER was delighted when I volunteered to go along that night with two of my Kroo boys, but the General still maintained his self-sufficient calm. I knew it was going to be a fight; I wasn't kidding myself on that point. But it was the girl I feared for. Carver, I figured, would merely slide over the surface of it all.

"There followed the most damnable hour of preparation. They would have strolled out there, as they were, as if for a lawn party, I think, but after a lot of persistency I got them into cholera belts, and made them down a double-dose of quinine each. Not the least part of my discomfort were my house boys. I knew that they knew, and that the whole town knew, and I could imagine the yapping and nigger-gossip.

"Well, we got started at last. It was one of those still, sultry nights. There was only a thin sickle of a moon, like a paring of a yellow finger nail. As I urged on the Kroo boys who were in lead, the ticklishness of the thing I had undertaken bore down on me, heavier with each yard we progressed. First, we crossed the lagoon, which was merely a broadening out of the jungle river. This was at my order, for I wanted to come upon the camp of Channa from an unexpected angle. Part of my plan depended upon that, for I had a good idea of what we should find.

"There's a grisly sort of earth-shine that hovers over the Bush on a night like that. You've seen it yourselves, no doubt. It's partly vegetal, I think, as if everything were rotting in phosphorescence. Our natives took the lead as we plunged into the jungle. I remember the yellow-white gleam of their eyes, as we passed through an occasional patch where the queer shine seemed to sift down through the trees. We came to an interminable stretch that was black as a pocket, where we slid and scrambled through rank growths and over fallen logs.

"I kept close to Miss Carver. In all that journey she did not utter a sound or protest, but gradually I saw, or rather felt, a nameless terror stealing over her. She showed nothing on the outside, but I was keyed to a hair to register her every tremor. I got her sensation of smothering as the vegetation became denser about us. It always takes one's breath away at first, seeming to make the very air thick. Carver cursed occasionally as he stumbled on uneven ground.

"We neared the niggers' camp at last, going mainly by the sounds which we could now plainly hear—thumping of skin drums and high-pitched cries. Then we came within sight of glowing fires. I directed the two natives quietly, in their own dialect, as we crept cautiously nearer. The sounds grew more distinct.

"'No noise, now! Understand, Mr. Carver?' I whispered.

"'Are you all right?' I asked the girl. 'Feeling game?'

"She nodded, biting her lip.

"Then we crept forward again, almost on all fours. The scene in front grew clearer. We reached a last growth of underbrush and parted the foliage. It was as raw and barbaric a thing as I've ever seen. It was the girl's first touch of Africa with the lid off.

"No need of going into detail to you about what we saw. There was the usual circle of yapping blacks, over a hundred of them, fine stalwart fellows from the warlike tribes inland—Gallas most of them. They sat on their hams on the ground in an open glade, while their women squatted just outside the circle, partly in shadow. Two great fires burned in the center, and all about torches were blazing. On a bamboo pole, stuck in the center of the circle was a dried human head and about this a ghost dance was in progress. The jumping light struck oily gleams from the bodies of the dancers and from the broad blades of spears and assegais. The dancers kept time to the rhythmic throb of skin-drums and the low chant of the scant-clad women.

"A few wrinkled old crones crouched about the fires, roasting a body on a rude spit—a long body with paws and a tail still intact—a tail that curled from the heat—curled tighter and tighter unil I saw it snap and fall off. It was plucked instantly from the coals and eaten by a mummified old wench.

"'What the devil are we standing here for, like a lot of fools?' It was Carver's voice and there was a bit of a quaver in it. 'Come on.'

"'Wait!' I commanded sharply. I was not through with them yet.

"Now I saw that a weakness and nausea was coming over Miss Carver—the inevitable Anglo-Saxon disgust. There was a light in her eyes—a light of fascinated horror, and I put out a hand to steady her.

"'Keep cool,' I whispered, but she did not seem to notice me.

"The drummers in the circle beat faster now; the women began joining the men in the mad revel about the pole with its grinning trophy. A veritable clamant nightmare ensued, of leaping, fanatical figures, silhouetted against the screen of writhing branches. Even Carver was stilled.

"Very slowly we pressed closer, until we stood on the very edge of the clearing. Such was the fanatical intensity of the blacks that they had not yet sensed our presence. It was just as I had hoped; I knew we had already seen a whole lot more than Channa had intended.

"Suddenly, above the cries and yapping of the orgy, there came a clear, shrill cry, prolonged, like the lip-ululations of the North American Indian. Instantly the dance ceased, the drumming died to a hoarse rubbing, and into the circle stepped the figure of Channa, the witch doctor. He was the most hideous spectacle I have ever seen. I felt Jane Carver reach out involuntarily and took her hand."

"CHANNA was naked except for some strings of human teeth that encircled his neck and ankles. The head and horns of some animal were fitted tightly over his skull. His face, with its ghastly coating of grey-green, made him look like the traditional figure of Pestilence; and he had put plates in his mouth so that the lips were frightfully stretched apart, showing two rows of gleaming white teeth. Above them the eyes shone horribly. He addressed the assembly in high-pitched Galla.

"No need of my repeating the rigmarole to you fellows. It was the regular line-up of ju-ju mummeries, most of it senseless and only designed to instill the assembly with fear. Of course there was to be a sacrifice, for he, Channa, had divined through his sorcery that one of the Galla tribe had broken the *tabu* of the black lodge. The fellow was an accomplished actor as well as a skilled hypnotist, as are all your genuine priests of *fetish*.

"It was uncanny to see the effect of his stuff on the assembly. I saw the

circle of blacks swayed as a field of grass under a wind by his primitive galvanisms. Channa cried out with sudden sharpness that he sensed the guilty one was among the assembly, that this was the night for the punishment. The great ju-ju himself called for blood, blood, and until the sacrifice was made, the tribe would be harassed, their numbers decimated by war and sleeping-sickness, their women stolen. He was drawing on the core of that unclean thing from which the spiritism of all ages has sprung.

"Call it fancy, but to me there has always been a malignant entity that hovers over the lands under the Equator. It has its source in the jungle's choking fecundity, and the fear and death it hides in its smothering heart. I think it is the thing that the first fakir of all time played upon to mould primitive minds to his will.

"There followed the usual Sorcerer's dance of divination, a rigmarole of sheer, calculated cruelty. Round and round the lighted circle Channa cavorted in a sort of hellish gambol, his eyes glowing with a fiendish satisfaction as they searched the ashen faces of the negroes turned up to him.

"Suddenly he stopped dead. You know how the thing always ends. The chosen sacrifice was a woman—a huge sooty creature, crouched down among the back ranks. I remember her throaty cry of horror as his finger sought her out and how she tried to jerk herself away into the bushes.

"The niggers were upon her in a black wave. It was then that I heard a cry from Jane Carver and I saw her face—a glory of anguish. She had been a psychic sponge for all that damnable tableau. For all her strength of mind and purpose she was the absolute feminine, negative and psychic to the core. I could have shot myself then for allowing her to come at all.

"Carver's voice broke the silence, bringing out all the stored-up hell left in my system.

"'The camera, boy; quick!' he bawled. 'I must have this.' Already he held a match ready to light the flash.

"'Stop!' I yelled, with all the threat I could put into it. 'Back, I tell you, back!' I staggered over to him, with the girl a dead weight in my arms—intending to stamp out his infernal fuse. The blacks had jerked that gibbering wench to her feet now. I saw the flash of upraised knives, and what followed was like a picture out of hell.

"I never reached that fuse. Before I got to Carver's side, it flashed out, a blinding white flare.

"'Good God!' groaned Carver at the same instant. 'Good God!' His eyes were popping, and the camera he held clattered to the ground. I think he had imagined it was all a bit of realistic mummery up to that moment.

"'You're not in Shropshire now,' I cackled at him. 'This is one of the habits of the primitive black at close range. Come here and give me a hand with your daughter.'

"He saw her condition then for the first time, and emitted a sort of choking sob. It was flooding into him now that there was deviltry in this thing, deviltry in everything he had been seeing for weeks, and that he had never suspected it. 'My girl,' he faltered, 'my girl!'

"The negroes stood paralyzed for a moment, after that flash of powder, the yellow-whites of their eyes rolling with fear. Above all else I was conscious of the gaze of Channa in that moment, picking us out where we stood. Dead silence had fallen. Then a mass of blacks suddenly surged upon us, with mad yells.

"A sharp swish of an assegai and one of my black boys fell with a gurgling moan and didn't get up. Carver's automatic as well as my own were in action now, and that held them in check until we gained the denser jungle. Then behind us, as I had expected, I heard the shrill, imperative voice of Channa, calling them back. He had recognized us and saw that his game with the General was up. He had too much sense to buck up against the Administration.

"We heard the yelling gradually die away behind us. I don't know how we ever reached the boat again. Miss Carver seemed to be dying; her face was deathly white and we half carried, half dragged her along in our flight. She fell into something like a sleep, but at intervals of a few minutes would revive and stare about her with an expression of horror that I have never seen equaled. Old Carver was lumberingly useless; he limited himself to delivering a characteristic admonition as we crashed along: 'Be brave, my girl, be brave.'

"It was not until we were entering the town that she regained her bodily control. A remarkable change came over her on the instant. Her soft willowy body became tense and vibrant; the dull luster dropped from her eyes, leaving them gleaming with that shivery, clairvoyant glare I had seen in them before. Then I noted the effect of her attitude on our black carrier.

"A moment he stood frozen in position, studying her face with an expression of peculiar intensity mixed with dread. He fell behind after that, showing the whites of his eyes, and seeming ready to bolt. The girl's lips were very red and moist, and parted slightly; her big eyes became eloquent with an inexpressible expression of fear, longing and expectancy. The whole of her seemed strained and listening—listening into the silence of the bush from which we had come.

"Between us the General and I spurred her on again, speaking quietly and soothingly to her. Something premonitory was breaking in my brain; an insidious canvassing that I could not shake off. I had heard tales of the Evil Eye and of the various spells cast by *fetish* priests.

"Again she stopped dead. She was looking down with horror at her body, at her hands, as if they were foreign to her. She tried to lift them; they came up slowly, falteringly, to her breast, then dropped leadenly to her sides again. I had to turn away. I was growing cold all over, yet I feared to do anything lest it loose some dark force that seemed hovering over her, ready to shoot down a groove and annihilate her. My skin prickled.

"'What is it? What *is* it?' she was saying, in the dazed sort of way I have heard fever patients talk.

"'Hurry,' I urged. 'It's all right; we're almost there.'

"I felt her shivering all over, and heard the small chatter of her teeth.

"Suddenly she screamed: 'My God! What is the matter with me, what is the matter with me?'

"With a frightened yell, the black boy who had been coming along behind, turned and bolted with a gasping admonition: '*Brinnie, taku; Brinnie, taku!*' (Chief, look out!)"

"WHAT followed shook any beliefs I have ever had about life down here being charted for us. As we rushed the girl between us up the path to the consulate, there came a wild, mad laugh from the jungle, like that of a crazed man, or one in the last stages of *hashish* breakdown. It made the skin creep along my spine. I thought instantly of a hyena, but knew as quickly that it was not that.

"Then, to my horror, the sound was repeated. It rose, shivering to a high crescendo, and burst in a hysterical gasp almost at my side. So inhuman was the cry that it was a moment before I could realize that it came from the lips of Miss Carver herself. But suddenly she had broken from the General's grasp and sped away with the fleetness of a wild thing.

"We flung ourselves after her, the General and I, but she seemed suddenly possessed of a strength and agility that was superhuman. Straight through the town we pursued her. All the niggers were up and stirring; they fled away on all sides with cries of terror and vituperation, as if we had loosed some loathsome thing in their midst. 'Mother of God!' I heard old Carver moan as he ran, and my heart went out to him in that moment. Something of the genuine man in him was coming out at last.

"We overtook Miss Carver at the jungle fringe. She struggled like a panther in our grasp and it took the strength of the two of us to hold her. I saw that she was utterly possessed, in mind and body, by that vile force that had its source in the jungle glade. She scratched and panted, giving vent to horrible cutting cries. Her great eyes blazed at us without cognizance; her nostrils flared and contracted, and I saw that face of beauty becoming utterly demoniac before my eyes.

"She used her nails and teeth on us, and twice she almost wrenched herself free. Even as we struggled I was acutely aware of someone or something skulking in the nearby bush— and it was that something which she was struggling to reach—some damnable undercurrent that flowed between them.

"I shall never forget the agony of that situation as I strained with all my power to hold that soft body I had come to love, a body suddenly become charged with a strength that was unbelievable. Her every muscle jerked and twitched as if possessed by a separate and perverse life of its own. My heart was torn between compassion and a sick horror. It was like a battle for a soul. I tell you I saw her true spirit departing from her body.

"No living thing could have kept up those violent convulsions for long. She sank back at last, utterly still in our arms, but it was the stillness of a wild thing, waiting for a moment's laxness to spring away.

"Carrying her between us, we got her back to the consulate. I looked at old Carver's face under the lamp-light, and what I saw erased a good deal of the contempt I had been harboring for him. He was gray as death.

"'What in God's name is it?' he asked, and his voice broke.

"'It's Channa!' I snapped at him. 'Perhaps after tonight you will let matters of ju-ju worship alone.'

"An old black mammy who helped keep order about me, entered at my call, her eyes popping from her head. I knew she had seen many things in her years.

"'She is mad,' I said in the woman's ear.

"'She is possessed of a devil, Inkoos,' said the woman with a queer fatalistic gesture of avocation.

"The words seemed to take me back a thousand years, to the days of necromancy and black-art. I saw ancient Africa as she had simmered for centuries, full of sinister dreams, under the dread shadow of her fanatical and misunderstood religions.

"I called for alcohol and had her body vigorously rubbed and her head and throat bathed with it. I was clinging to the hope that it might be no more than an extreme nervous breakdown. We tried holding ammonia under her nose. It had no more effect on her than water.

"'It is no use, Inkoos,' the negress repeated. 'It is a very powerful devil. Soon he will either kill her or abandon her.'

"My sense of utter helplessness angered me. My eyes met those of Carver who was kneeling beside the girl. I think he was being reborn at that moment. Veins stood out on his temples and his mouth had narrowed to a thin tight line. I knew that nothing but exorcism would avail.

"I clapped my hands. Wafa appeared on the threshold.

"'Wafa, go get Channa, the witch-doctor,' I commanded through clenched teeth. 'Bring him to me.' I was playing the one last card.

"The boy stood shifting from one foot to the other; his eyes rolled with fear, and his face had turned gray under its black.

"'Inkoos, I dare not,' he chattered. 'There is much medicine in the jungle tonight. Channa make much, much magic. It would be death—'

"I heard a stifled curse from Carver. I advanced on Wafa with clenched fist. I was trembling, and I remember I swore horribly.

"'Go find Channa!' I cried again. "Tell him Cloots wants him. Understand? Cloots wants him quick—quick, and if he doesn't come I'll have the whole Government down here to blow him and his devil tribe off the earth. Savvy? Scoot now!"

"I turned back to the cot, and it was not until a minute or two later that I saw that Carver had disappeared. I guessed then where he had gone, and I knew that I should never have allowed him out of my sight again that night.

"You can imagine the horror of the next hour as I sat there waiting, damning myself for all that had come of the night's work. I held myself responsible for everything, and the self-crucifixion I underwent would have atoned for a sin against the soul.

"I heard a stealthy shuffle of feet on the veranda at last, and quietly reached up to the shelf above the cot to where my automatic lay. The door opened and Channa stood on the threshold. Some of his hideous paint had been removed, and his lean body was wrapped in a robe.

"Jane Carver sat up suddenly with a terrified shriek.

"'There's nothing to fear,' I soothed, placing my hand on her shoulder. 'You'll be all right in a minute.'

"I had Channa covered now, and I began speaking. I had to keep a strong grip on myself or I should have annihilated the beggar at once, for I have never felt such abomination for a living thing.

"'Come here,' I said to him. 'This is some of your work.' I pointed to Miss Carver.

"He grinned sardonically, keeping his calm exterior. I brought the pistol slowly down until it was directly in line with the fellow's solar plexus. It's a queer fact that a man can usually look down a leveled gun barrel more or less calmly, but let the barrel be lowered to the region of the abdomen and there'll be results, and quickly.

"Channa made a nasty grimace of fear and tried to side-step.

"'I'll give you exactly half a minute . . .' my voice broke a bit. . . 'to bring her out of that.'

"'Why call me, Inkoos?' he asked, opening his palms to signify that his mind was blank on the matter. 'What can Channa know of this madness?'

"'Channa knows overmuch of it,' I snapped, and my finger fairly trembled as it curled about the trigger. 'Come, I am in no mood for fooling, I'll give you to twenty.' And I began to count.

"Channa was thinking quickly.

"'Leave us, Inkoos,' he clicked, but I saw cunning in his eye.

"'Nothing doing,' I said. 'Get busy now, or by heaven I'll spatter you all over the room!'

"He threw off his robe then and stood before the girl. She screamed again horribly, and it was all I could do to hold her.

"'Listen. It's all right. We're going to fix you up—' I cried, but my words beat vainly against her dimming consciousness. She clung to me in a frenzy.

Channa thrust his narrow head forward to within a foot of her face, his eyes glittering with a concentration that seemed to beat down and overcome her fear, her will, her power of movement. The glare began to leave her eyes and

she emitted little choking sobs like a child in fear of punishment. Suddenly in a shrill voice, Channa poured forth a torrent of livid words in a dialect I had never heard; then he ceased as abruptly as he had begun and cried out in English:

"'Who are you?'

"'I am Lejara,' she answered, and why or whence the name came, I have never been able to make out.

"'Thou liest!' shrieked the witch-doctor. 'Thou art a devil and a beast! From whence do you come?'

"I saw the girl's eyes protrude, her fingers opening and closing, in her tremendous effort to break away from the relentless will back of those eyes. Channa stamped with rage.

"'Whence comest thou?' he repeated.

"I had to turn away as she screamed and gritted her teeth together; that wild thing again gleaming in her eyes. She struggled with incredible energy. The witch-doctor howled in his pantomime, and his eyes darted fire.

"'I am burning up,' I heard her moan at last. 'A drink, a drink and I will tell all.' Her head sank back as from exhaustion.

"The whole thing was apparently the sheerest nonsense; but I had heard much of the strange practices of these sorcerers and held my patience.

"Channa became calm now. He seemed to reflect a moment quietly, and his mood moulded the girl's mental processes into the channel he wished. He was gradually super-inducing his own sanity into her. There was the devil's own subtlety in it.

"'Very well, devil,' he said presently. 'You shall have a drink—a very fine drinkee-yah.' He made a loud smacking with his lips. The girl was now showing every sign of extreme thirst. Her lips were parched and dry and her skin had a feverish burn.

"'A bowl, Inkoos, and some water,' said Channa, in a low voice that seemed to escape her altogether.

"I hurriedly brought in a bowl brimful. Channa snatched it from me and took it to a corner of the room, where he squatted over it, sucking in his breath and giving vent to uncouth ejaculations of greed, the while going through an outlandish pantomime of secrecy. I saw him reach surreptitiously into the skin bag he carried at his side and drop something into the bowl. It looked like some sort of dried herbs and I remember the fear that leapt into my mind, of poison or worse. But he had us there; there was nothing to do but trust him, though I held my automatic ready to squeeze at the first proof of trickery. Presently he had a queer-looking concoction stirred up, and set the bowl down upon the floor.

"Drink, devil," he leered at the girl. She strained forward eagerly in our arms and at a sign from Channa we promptly released her. She sprang forward like a wild thing and, stooping, drained the contents of the bowl with the avidity of one dying of thirst. When it was empty she straightened up queerly and let it fall; it shattered to pieces at her feet, and there she stood for a moment staring piteously about her, bewilderment taking the place of voracity in her eyes. I put up my automatic on the instant and sprang forward. She collapsed into my arms with a tired sigh that caught in her throat, and her eyes closed.

"I lifted her and carried her back to the cot. She opened her eyes once and murmured in a plaintive voice:

"'Dear God, I am so weary, so weary! Let me sleep!'

"I do not pretend to understand the thing," Cloots finished abruptly, "though I have pondered it ever since that night. The girl had been worse than a maniac; in an instant, she was cured. When I looked around for Channa, he was gone. I have never seen him since."

YOUNG Cranton poured a drink and pushed it toward Cloots across the small table.

"And old Carver?" someone asked after a minute.

"I did all I could," Cloots answered wearily. "When he didn't come in toward dawn, I went out with a search party, but we found nothing. The niggers had gone, moved on in the night. We had a hard time to find even the glade again, for they'd covered all trace.

"It was nearly a week before we heard anything of him—a story that came from away up in the Batu district about a lost white man who had staggered into a native village, over eighty miles up-river. They took him in, but he died before the party I sent out ever reached him. God alone knows how he ever got up there, but his end must have been horrible, by the look of his face when they brought him down. I have always laid it to Channa. The investigators put it down as sunstroke, and I let it pass as that. There was nothing to prove otherwise."

"And the girl—I suppose she went back?"

Cloots nodded. "Of course. We had a long talk after she was herself again and she saw things right. She made no protest at all when I arranged for her passage north the following week. I think she was cured."

He flicked the glowing stub of his cigarette over the railing and watched it descry a long red arc to the black water below.

"What a fool a man is," he laughed shortly. "I remember our last words at the steamer. I remember how my every nerve tingled when she asked me if I was coming back. I told her I would as soon as I'd finished a certain little fight I had here with myself, and, of course, we promised to get together back there. For days I built each hour toward that meeting. Of course, it was only dream stuff."

"But you will go back sometime?" said Cranton.

"Back?" repeated Cloots wearily. "I don't know. Fifteen years out here—I wonder if a chap ever goes back after fifteen years."

New York Jewel Robber Killed by Parisian Police

GABRIELE MOUREAU, wanted by the New York police in connection with a sensational jewel robbery in the home of Albert R. Shattuck in April, 1922, was killed by the Paris police recently while resisting arrest.

Five robbers led by Henri Boilat, butler in the Washington Square home of Albert R. Shattuck, retired financier, locked Mr. Shattuck, his wife and seven servants in the wine cellar of the house, where they were held prisoners until Mrs. Shattuck nearly died of suffocation.

Finally Mr. Shattuck pried open the lock to find the robbers had fled with $90,000 worth of jewelry.

With Moureau killed, and Eugene Diaset and Maurice Bagnoli arrested and serving forty to sixty year terms at Sing Sing prison, only two others are at large. Shattuck has offered a $20,000 reward for the arrest of Boilat.

Only one piece of the loot has ever been recovered. This was a $2,000 diamond-studded watch, which was seized by San Francisco police from a woman who said Boilat gave it to her.

A Gripping Story of the Algerian Sahara

THE HAND OF FATMA

By HARRY ANABLE KNIFFIN

TO MAJOR DARROW, Patricia's father, it was a memory redolent of almond groves, sandalwood, and the soft night winds of Algeria; a memory of starlit trysts with a youthful Arab beauty, and the magic of a charm, an ivory Hand of Fatma.

Major Darrow often recalled the night Aimee had given it him. A servant, at her bidding, had sawed the ivory hand in two, down the middle finger. One tiny half she presented to her lover, and the other she kept—and so they both were protected.

The major had accepted the gift with good humored tolerance for her superstition. Needless to say he failed to believe in it—until after their illicit affair was discovered, and he barely escaped with his life. But that is a story he never told in detail, fearing it might reach the ears of Patricia.

She was only eight years old when he returned to England. And this dashing, widowered father of hers soon filled her head with dreams of haughty Arabs and the great Algerian desert.

But what of the Arab beauty?

Ah! she is the reverse of the picture! Her memories, while she lived, were of the wrath of an outraged father, of being given in marriage to a servant, and living in a mud hovel in the village of Sidi Okba. But her misery was not for long. She died in giving birth to a male child, a half-brother to Patricia.

And what of the child, whose very existence was unsuspected by the major?

His life was one of wretchedness. For Hamed, his step-father, remarried at once, and both he and his wife gave the infant no more care than was absolutely necessary. Reared on kicks and curses, not a day passed that the boy's infidel blood was not tauntingly alluded to. It was the same in the village as it was in the home.

Half-caste and outcast, Aomar grew to the age of sixteen, filled with anger against his father and his father's race. His hatred was intensified by a fanatical old shiek, who preached the extermination of all foreigners by means of the sword.

Hamed, the step-father, in the meantime prospered. Biskra, twenty kilometers to the north, had become the resort of tourists. Parties of these often ventured into the desert as far as Abouda, or even Temassisse, the holy city. Hamed conducted them at great profit to himself, and Aomar he impressed into his service as a camel driver.

And what of Patricia?

She was twenty-three, and a charming, beautiful young woman, when she married Lord Anstruther, fifteen years her senior. It was said to be a love match, although there were those who raised their eyebrows and knowingly smiled, and said "Wait!" and "Watch out!"

The major was dead. He had bequeathed to Patricia his blessing, the tiny ivory hand, and little else—unless it be a belief in the charm, and a romantic dream of Africa.

They had been married two years when Anstruther expressed a desire to travel and to hunt big game. And so nothing could be more natural than that Patricia should suggest Algeria. Nor was it strange, upon their arrival in Biskra, that they should employ Hamed to conduct them into the desert.

And now—what of the story?

PATRICIA, followed by her husband, came slowly down the steps of their hotel. She nodded pleasantly to Hamed, who stood bowing low before her, then her inquiring glance wandered to the camels and their drivers.

"What a sleek, beautiful animal! It is meant for me, is it not?" She confidently approached the camel at whose head stood the waiting Aomar.

Thus they came face to face. There was nothing dramatic in the meeting. Merely a gracious, beautiful young woman of the great world smiling down into the countenance of an ignorant Arab boy, who frowned and looked away.

Patricia was assisted to her seat in the *atitich*, a kind of palanquin; her husband mounted behind Seid, a handsome young Arab; then the luggage and guns were secured to the pack-animals, and the caravan started on its journey into the interior.

The experience proved novel and delightful to Patricia. She attempted to engage her driver in conversation, asking him pleasantly in French if it never rained in the desert. Aomar, like most Algerian Arabs, posessed a smattering of that language, but he sullenly replied that he did not comprehend, and her friendly effort came to naught.

The heat increased with the day's advance. The creaking of leather and an occasional word or exclamation from the Arabs alone broke the stillness. A caravan carrying dates and other merchandise passed them going north, the dignified desert men gazing at them in silent curiosity.

In the early evening they stopped and struck camp near a small desert village hidden among the palms of an oasis. The tents were raised and a table laid for Patricia and her husband facing a western sky all saffron and rose.

Night descended. Anstruther, wearied by the journey, fell asleep in his chair. Even the sounds from the nearby village —the mournful note of a haut-boy and the throbbing beat of a drum—failed to waken him.

Patricia, alluring in short skirt and tan leather puttees, rose and strolled beyond the edge of the encampment. Pausing, she gazed up at the desert stars and at a new moon hanging low above the palms of the oasis.

A faint sound came from behind her. She turned and saw the figure of a man looming ten feet away.

"Who is it?" she called.

The figure moved forward. "Seid, Madame," and the dandified Arab guide bowed deferentially before her.

"Yes. What is it?" Her voice was kindly, her manner slightly detached.

"Madame had left the encampment. I merely watched to see that she came to no harm."

"You mean there is danger—from the village?" She approached and looked up into his handsome face, the starlight reflected in the blue depths of her eyes.

"Not from the village, but from the desert, Madame. It is a dangerous place to wander for those who do not know it. One can so easily become lost in the sandy wastes."

Patricia looked away toward the oasis, where a gleaming fire winked invitingly. The drum beat an insistent pulse, the haut-boy wailed its inexplicable longings.

"Tell me, Seid—what do they do there?" The question was soft spoken, barely audible. Seid bent his head to catch her words.

"It is the *danse du Zibans*, Madame—a desert dance." His eyes never left the wistful face and the beautiful form before him.

Again the drum-beat, the insistent, hypnotic drum-beat! It far exceeded her dreams—the alluring mystery of an African night!

"Would it be safe to go there, Seid?"

"Perfectly, Madame—if M'sieur would not object."

Several long, silent moments, then:

"He is asleep; he will not kn—care." A sigh escaped her, prelude to a sudden willful determination. "Come, you shall be my knight and squire me to the dance." She smiled up at him faintly.

Together they started for the village. Patricia appeared singularly quiet, dreamily content. A dog barked. She paused and looked questioningly at her companion.

"It will not harm me, will it, Seid?"

"No, Madame. We Arabs have a proverb: 'The stars are not harmed by the bark of dogs.'"

"Thank you, Seid. You are very poetic."

"One can not live long in the desert, Madame, and fail to become so." He lightly touched her arm to guide her over an uneven space.

"I can understand that, Seid. It is the effect of the solitude." She sighed, a deep exhalation of content.

They arrived at the edge of the oasis. Several snarling dogs came forth to challenge them. Seid spoke to them in Arabic and drove them slinking away.

In the shadow of the palms they paused. Not far distant a group of hooded Arabs squatted in a semi-circle round a brightly burning fire. Before them, swirling and gyrating, an Almee performed the *danse de Zibans*.

The flames leaped and fell, the shadows advanced and receded, but a far more potent flame—of sensuous grace and barbaric allurement—twinkled and flashed in the maze of the hypnotic dance. Modest flittings, coquettishly shy retreats, led to timid progressions followed by bold advances. Through a gossamer veil gleamed an ivory-hued body. Bizarre ornaments sparkled with each graceful swaying and startling abdominal contortion.

Elemental it assuredly was, but accompanied by the wail of the flute and the beat of the drum it held a singularly strange appeal. Patricia gazed at it as if fascinated, reminded of Babylon, of Nineveh, and the splendor of ancient days.

Oh, that drum! The rhythm of it was in her blood. She found herself swaying in time to it, her gaze held by the graceful creature now dancing before her with such shameless abandon. A feeling of languor overcame her. Her former identity seemed lost, swept away in the swirl of the dance. Here was where she belonged—in the vast starlit desert, with the haut-boy ever wailing and the drum continuously throbbing its *tum—tum—tum—tum!*

Presently, by a wrench, she freed herself from the spell and looked up at Seid. His dark, inscrutable eyes were bent upon her searchingly, questioningly.

"Take me back, Seid, take me back." Her words came barely above a whisper.

"Very well, Madame." He took her arm and led her out into the desert.

In silence they made their way along, Seid giving her opportunity to recover her poise. At last she spoke, her voice slightly tremulous with emotion.

"It was fascinating, Seid—thrilling; but I would not da—care to go again. Thank you for taking me. You have been very kind."

Seid shrugged. "It was Madame's wish; I merely obeyed."

They paused at the edge of the encampment. Anstruther still slept in his chair.

"Good-night, Seid." Patricia's smile was dreamily friendly. "And thank you."

Seid bowed gracefully. "Good-night, Madame."

He left her, her rapt gaze still lingering on the oasis. Presently he returned with a bottle and glasses.

"Your night water, Madame."

Again the wail of the haut-boy and the throbbing beat of the drum. Patricia turned, her eyes still wistful.

"Oh, Seid! Tomorrow I intend to change camels, and henceforth you shall be my driver."

"Thank you, Madame. Pleasant dreams."

PATRICIA effected a change of mounts the following morning. As she told Anstruther, the boy, Aomar, appeared sullen and dumb, and she desired a driver who could answer her questions.

Strangely enough, Aomar seemed to resent the act as a personal affront. Patricia often caught his frowning glance turned upon her. To avoid the unpleasantness of his gaze, she directed Seid to allow his camel to lag behind the others.

In the unbroken solitude Patricia found a soothing appeal. She never tired of the wide wastes and the far-flung horizon, where an occasional caravan passed in silent silhouette. Seid told her much concerning Arab life and customs. From him she learned about Aomar—that he was the half-caste son of an English father and, in consequence, felt no love for her race. Indeed, by her act, she seemed to have become the focusing point of his hatred.

No longer were there drums to disturb her emotions. Once in her sleep she heard the rhythmic beat and caught the gleam of a half-naked body in the firelight. She awoke, her heart thumping wildly, but soon fell asleep again, her hand clasping the ivory charm suspended about her neck.

On several occasions Anstruther questioned Hamed concerning the game to be found in those parts. The latter assured him that gazelle and mouflon abounded further in the desert.

Late in the afternoon of the fourth day, they approached the gleaming white domes and minarets of Abouda. At a word from Patricia, Seid gave his camel the signal with his foot and the animal increased his pace, the other camels following his lead.

In single file they passed through the massive gates to the walled Oriental city, stopping in a broad open square from which debouched narrow cobbled streets. Aomar, boylike, showed a keen interest in the bazars.

After a cursory view of the town, they returned to the desert and set up their camp. Before the work was completed the sun had set and the gates of the city were closed. Aomar grunted his dissatisfaction. He complained to Hamed that he had not had his fill of the bazars.

Hamed upbraided him for his impudence. Cursed son of an infidel, would he never be satisfied? Were they not to stay over the following day and part of the next? He then grudgingly admitted that on the morrow the Ingleese lord was to take the men on a hunting trip of twenty-four hours duration, the lady being left with Seid and Aomar.

These plans were put into effect the following morning. After the hunting party had left, Seid moved silently about the camp, directing Aomar in his tasks. Occasionally he waited on Patricia, who sat reading before her tent under the shade of an awning. Toward four in the afternoon he told the boy he might go visit the town if he so desired. He also assured him he need be in no hurry to return.

PATRICIA read her book in calm content. She felt vaguely conscious of Seid's presence at times, but the novel held her attention and she gave little heed to his comings and goings.

At last the failing light forced her to set the book aside. Seid came and laid the table for the evening meal, then lit the lantern suspended above the tent entrance. She rose and strolled a short distance away. The sun was setting, edging the domes and minarets of Abouda with rims of gold.

She watched the western sky change to pale green, turquoise, then to the purple of night. The stars came out, their needle-rays faintly illumining the desert. Africa! The thrill of it seemed never to pall!

"Dinner awaits, Madame!"

Seid, handsome and slenderly erect, was at her elbow. Her eyes continued to linger on the desert.

"Is it not wonderful, Seid?"

His soft spoken answer came charged with feeling: "Wonderful indeed, because Madame herself is a part of the picture."

The new note in his voice struck unpleasantly upon her ear. She turned and walked silently to her seat at the table.

Doubt, the forerunner of fear, was beginning to trouble her. Was it entirely safe for a personable young woman to be left alone with Arabs? Pshaw! there were two of them—unfriendly at that. One would act as a restraint upon the other. She glanced about in search of Aomar. He was nowhere in sight.

Slowly and with an appearance of calmness she ate her dinner. Occasionally she addressed a pleasant word to Seid, as he deftly waited upon her. Under lowered lashes she watched him, studied him.

A subtle difference was noticeable in his manner. Polite and deferential, there yet was about him a subdued air of expectancy, of carefully repressed elation. It revealed itself in the timbre of his voice, in the gleam of his dark eyes.

Time passed. Dinner was over, and Seid was clearing away the remains. She spoke with an air of careless indifference.

"The boy, Aomar, Seid—I don't see him about. Is he in his tent?"

Seid paused and looked at her significantly. "No, Madame; he went to visit the town."

Her fingers, toying with a bread crumb, exerted a sudden flattening pressure.

"But I thought they closed the gates at sundown?"

"They do, Madame. Doubtless he became interested in the bazars and lost track of time. It must be that he is locked in."

Patricia drew in her breath slowly. "Poor boy," she said evenly. "And will they detain him long?"

Seid placed his hands upon the table and bent slightly toward her.

"Until sunrise, Madame."

She looked up at him searchingly. On all sides stretched the Sahara, silent save for the distant muffled noises of the walled-in city. How utterly, how hopelessly alone she was!

"Madame loves the desert," Seid was saying tenderly. "Her soul is attuned to the poetry, the mystery of it. She revealed the depth of her feelings on the night of the dance, which Allah forbid I should ever forget."

"Seid!" Startled, dismayed, she raised her hand in an arresting gesture.

Unheeding, Seid swept on:

"It is indeed a wonderful experience for a man and a woman to be alone in this great solitude, with none to interrupt their love-making, none to spy upon them but the far-away stars. It is so with us. No one will ever know what transpires tonight, for I shall be dumb as the sands about us."

Silence, tense, palpable, and the Arab's ardent glances; then—the faintest possible stir behind her, heartening her, giving her courage. Had Aomar returned? Even the presence of one who regarded her with hatred, brought her a feeling of reassurance. At least she was not alone with this amorous Arab.

Her next words were spoken with simulated weariness: "That will do, Seid. I have had a surfeit of melodrama."

She picked up her vanity case and began powdering her nose. Her eyes darted a swift, anxious glance into the mirror. It reflected the dark shadows behind her where something crouched, moved slightly among the tufts of camel-grass.

"Now tell me," she said quietly, "why you assumed I would entertain your villainous proposition."

Seid's glance wavered, shifted uneasily, his *savoir faire* dissipated by her unexplainable behavior.

"Madame convinced me by her interest that she cared," he answered sullenly.

Patricia replaced the mirror upon the table and regarded him questioningly.

"It may be partly my fault," she said. "But let this be a lesson to you not hastily to judge women whose habits and customs you do not understand. I am sure you mean to be a gentleman and will behave as such. I shall not mention this to my husband, for he would deal with you harshly. That is all."

Seid hesitated, considering.

Had she won? Would he go peaceably? Or must there be a struggle, a terrifying physical conflict in which his superior strength would assure him the victory. She waited, outwardly calm, inwardly tense.

Presently he turned, and, without word or glance, stalked off into the shadows.

She relaxed. Gradually her manner became calmer. After all, Seid was instinctively chivalrous. He had always been courteous, showing a nice regard for delicate little attentions. Unwittingly she had led him on, and the poor fellow had fallen in love with her. She sighed pensively. What woman, in her heart, could blame a man for that!

In a few moments Seid approached and placed before her the accustomed glass and bottle.

"Your night water, Madame."

"Thank you, Seid." Her voice was kindly. "Remember I trust you. Put out the light, please, before you retire."

In no way could she have shown greater confidence in his honor. Seid bowed and turned his attention to the lantern. The light glimmered out, leaving them in semi-darkness.

He lingered a moment, a shadowy form against the starlight. Then, with a "*Bonne nuit*, Madame," he left her and made his way to where the camels were tethered.

Patricia missed the significance of his action, failed to grasp the fact that he was preparing for flight. She sat gazing fixedly at the starlit desert. Somewhere in that vast solitude was her husband and protector. Sighing, she poured out a glass of water. There being no one to warn her, she raised it to her lips and drank half its contents.

Presently she rose and glanced behind her. Aomar was not in sight. Doubtless he had retired. She wondered whether or no he would have raised his hand to save her. In all probability his hatred would have stayed his hand. Well, the moral influence of his presence had turned the trick in her favor. She entered the tent and let down the flap.

Slowly she undressed. Her movements became more and more retarded by a feeling of inertia, an incipient form of muscular paralysis. It rapidly increased. By the time she had thrown herself upon her couch, she felt powerless to move, unable even to draw up the covers. Her mind was still clear. By all means in her power she must retain her senses!

Alarmed, she reviewed the situation. Seid, of course, had drugged the water, but she failed to take enough to overcome her mentally. Evidently he had preferred the subtlety of this method to brute force. And now at any moment she might expect a visit from him.

She lay there in an agony of dread until a slight sound came at the entrance. Unable to move, she listened, tense with fear. On hands and knees some one was approaching, quietly, stealthily. Through the ventilating hole in the tent-top the starlight shone faintly. Her eyes were silghtly open, her head thrown back in a position to see—only when the intruder should reach the couch.

He had arrived. Slowly there rose into her line of vision the head and shoulders of Aomar. His face was set in grim determination; his right hand clasped a knife.

She tried agonizedly to fathom his motive. It must be revenge for the slight she had put upon him, for all the insults, all the misery he had endured because of her race. Doubtless to his ignorant, fanatical mind a blood sacrifice was demanded. An Englishman had wronged his mother, ultimately causing her death in childbirth. And now she, Patricia, was to pay the price!

If such a dreadful thing had to be, why did he wait? Through the fringe of her lashes she viewed his triumphant, gloating expression. The suspense was terrifying; she nearly swooned with fear. Blindly gazing at the face above her, she saw the look of hatred slowly fade, change, give place to startled amazement. His hand reached out uncertainly and touched the charm on her breast. He fingered it stupidly for a moment, then bent and examined it closely. Presently he reached into his burnouse and brought forth its counterpart.

He fitted the two halves of the ivory hand together, then his eyes regarded her wonderingly. She, too, wondered, her mind awakened to a startling possibility. The boy's father—her father—

The light in the tent grew brighter; surrounding objects lost their vagueness and became suddenly distinct. Aomar quickly turned and looked over his shoulder. It must be the tent flap was raised, letting in the starlight. Noiseless as a shadow, the boy vanished behind her upended steamer trunk.

This must be Seid, feeling his way to the side of the couch. Two Arabs in her tent, each on his own sinister errand! How would Aomar react to the situation? Just what did the charm mean to him? Would he passively stand by and allow Seid to accomplish his purpose?

It *was* Seid. He was kneeling now, and she could see his face, lighted by bestial passion. He leaned forward to

(Continued on page 82)

A Gruesome Story
Powerfully Written

THE MAN WHO BANISHED HIMSELF

By FERDINAND BERTHOUD

LITTLE Africa, this is why some men die.

The man sat down and looked over the haze. Looked in a way that didn't seem to be a look at all. Looked nowhere but into the back of his mind. Somehow it appeared in the hazy African mist he saw, unseeing, lost things—mirages. A lost life perhaps, perhaps lost ambition.

You know, Little Africa, when ambition goes the world ends up and is a blank. And in the haze of all the rest of life there are mirages. Things that we could have done—things for good or bad. Good, mostly, Little Africa. All men mean good—unless there come mirages.

The man sat back on the rough three-pole seat under the veranda of the wattle and daub trading store—and just sat. His gray-black shirt was open almost to the waist, his naked feet were crossed and felt each other, and his toes caressed like a baby's little toes and didn't know they did it. Toes played with toes and flexed and stroked and loved.

Hundreds in pocket, the line cut off six hundred miles below, no shoes, no food. Nothing! The man sat back. Just sat.

"Mouti, M'Lungu. Medicine," a voice came to him.

The man drowsed up, looked at the awful thing before him, with stinking blanket on and wide, congested stomach and pipe stem limbs. Looked and wasn't even interested. What, Little Africa, is the use of being interested in the everyday which you can't help?

"Mouti? What did you eat last? When did you eat last?"

The pitiful Kaffir hag rubbed her stomach with one hand and her ghastly face bravely tried to smile.

"Some donkey skin, M'Lungu. I dug up a donkey that the police shot for horse sickness a moon ago. I boiled some of the skin."

"Um?" the man muttered. "And if there was a God I'd give my soul to that God to be able to help you. But there's no longer a God—up here."

The skeleton woman crouched in trembling hope a few feet from the man. In trusting patience, she dumbly squatted and waited. The man forgot her, forgot her stench, looked to the sizzling haze.

Little Africa, in times of actual stress all mental morals go. It isn't cruelty; it's mutual misery. Six hundred miles

from the railhead, drought, horse sickness, rebellion, famine! A snap of the fingers—Ah! but the fingers were far too dry to even snap.

The man dreamed on and on, stretched out his naked feet, felt the ants bite them, looked stupidly at them and wondered nothing. And the sun came down like crackling indignation. Indignation that it couldn't kill the world. The burned-off veldt, right to the horizon, laughed its black face at being for once immune.

And the scent of burned-off grass and bush came floating over.

The man sniffed his nose, stretched legs which cracked, got up. As a man the jackals are not here to eat them. The suffering hag. Laughed! Then his face came sober.

"And you're a mother?" he said. "And I'm a father. And I can no more help you than you can help me. The store is empty. I have tinned sardines and whisky. That's all. Not even meal. I don't know even if I have the strength to cut the lid from a tin of those same fish."

"M'Lungu. M'Kewa. Chief. White man," the woman said in the trust of despair.

"Oh, don't call me names," the man came back in Kaffir in feeble joke. "Today I'm as you are. Umfazi, woman, we're looking straight at death."

The woman really smiled and showed teeth under a taut, skin-tight jaw.

"I know it, M'Lungu. I stepped over some of them as I came to you. Even the jackals are not here to eat them. The country is empty of all life, and my life is going, too."

Little Africa, this is terrible, but it's the truth. We found him afterwards and most of his message written in his useless cashbox. He'd put the story there for someone in case a human being should ever again in history care to venture up in that forbidding land.

The man staggered on his feet, felt the hot sand, laughed as he'd laughed at many a music hall show, laughed as he'd done at a good turn in Drury Lane or at a dinner in the old Savoy when his own clothes and the clothes of "Her" would have kept a family for a year. Just laughed. The Kaffir hag laughed with him, not knowing why he laughed.

"Come inside," the man said drily. "Come inside. There's sardines and whisky, and you and I and death. And how can man die happier?"

The woman faltered to her feet and threw her heavy blanket aside. Her strength was far too gone to carry it and stand the hope of food and "mouti," the medicine to clear her of the congested donkey skin. Hope was in her, the want of company in the man. Company in death—not the hunger of carnality.

The man counted out—four tins of sardines left and not an eatable or shootable thing within six hundred miles. No strength to shoot in any case. The end. The man'd die gamely.

TWO tins he opened and gave to the naked woman; one he opened and ate on the blade of his knife. And he gave the woman some of the useless whisky, which meant nothing any more.

And side by side at the counter, with his arm around her, the man who had eaten at the most distinguished clubs in London ate and drank with the most distinguished thing on earth—one who faces certain death and can smile.

The man gave her more whisky, Little Africa, and gave her more and more. Her system was better than his that way and her need was more exceptional. The woman woke, the man woke. Strangely, the man who was going to die kissed the woman who was going to die—a thing he'd have loathed just one short week before and the woman didn't understand. Kaffirs don't kiss.

But he kissed her—for a woman, from Patagonia to the Volga, is a woman—and a man facing the going out would always have one last kiss from any woman, then Heaven is unnecessary. He kissed her just as they stood side by side up against the packing case counter and when she had a handful of sardines in her mouth.

The two went out under the veranda, and side by side white man and Kaffir woman sat. She knew what she was facing—he knew what he was facing. The present for perhaps another day, the uncertain future forever. Company! Against all laws of outside, civilized nature company. And she'd play straight. Just the touch of a starving arm, a starving lip, a starving soul. God! Little Africa, have you seen that?

The Kaffir woman sat, and a Kaffir only squats. She sat like a lady because her day was out forever—and some people know how small life is.

"M'Lungu," she asked. "Why did a big chief like you come into a country where all is unhappiness?"

The big chief turned a neck which creaked.

"I came to escape unhappiness."

And then the Kaffir looked at him with all the knowledge of a million centuries.

"They always let us live till last, don't they?" she said in her own language.

The man put an arm round her and drew the woman to him. To him she was suddenly sweet. They *all* know. We all know, don't we?

We know the things we've lost.

And in the Hell of the Awful Forced Last Day it comes back. It never leaves, Little Africa.

The man held her, and somehow it didn't seem right. Held her to him and felt the knifelike ribs at her sides, the bulge of the undigested horror of food in the stomach which a vulture would turn sickly at.

Then the man answered:

"Yes, they let us live."

The liquor in the woman had warmed and she seemed to find her brain.

"The M'Lungu came here for something he didn't want to?" she ventured inquisitively.

In death truth doesn't hurt.

"Yeabo, umfazi. Yes. I came to kill my mind. To escape the woman I loved."

The woman looked at him in a way that means the world.

"In my race there is no mutual love—at least none that we're supposed to recognize. We're bought and sold, but—"

The man hugged the Kaffir woman to him with greater strength.

"'But is all life." he said. "Just 'but.' And I loved her better than God loves His children, cleaner than the deer its young, stauncher than an elephant its only child. We married. We had just that one child."

The woman looked up knowingly.

"The child die, M'Lungu?"

"No. The woman died—to me."

"You sold her, M'Lungu?"

"No, she sold herself."

"And then you hated her?"

The man's eyes looked into the haze, and through the haze and into a life that might have been. Looked at the woman he'd married and the man who'd stolen her. Looked at the scorn that showed upon her face when he'd tried to get her back, looked at the great disdain when she'd hung upon a man more powerful than he, more able to make life as she thought she was entitled to have had it.

"No, I loved her," the man said quietly. "There are some loves which Hell itself can't kill."

The woman drooped forward.

"There is no single word in Matabele for what you call 'love,'" she said.

"No," the man answered. "Why need there be when there's this?"

Round the corner of the baking mud store came the mother of two little babies—the mother of two little pups. Two little terrier brats. The mother staggered, wabbled on her legs, whined. Turned to her babies and with dry

tongue stroked their burning coats. The babies panted and staggered too. The mother came and looked with dying, trusting eyes into the face of the dying white man.

"M'Lungu. M'kewa," the Kaffir muttered. "There is meat Why not kill them?"

The woman made a hungry grab and the man stopped her. Suddenly he laughed.

"Why kill them, umfazi? They are my only friends on earth—all that I have left."

In her last day the woman questioned: "Why keep a dog alive?"

"A dog? She had nine pups, umfazi. She caught rats for them and I found her milk. The goats died. The rats died. The country died. The lizards died. The country burned. Then I killed her pups one by one and fed her on them that she might feed the rest and keep me company."

The woman dully moved her eyes and she, too, looked into the haze. Her skeleton hands touched flabby, leathery breasts and she appeared to dream.

"M'Lungu," she breathed, "not only the get of dogs die that way—sometimes."

The man went back into the store and opened the last tin of sardines between him and the question of the Hereafter.

"Eat this," he told the woman. "Somehow it seems to me that you are the incarnation of the woman who turned on me, the spirit of her. It seems that, after all, I have to die with a woman who can't save herself and who I now can't save."

Little Africa, things come back on us. There is a Divinity which sees to everything.

THE woman ate—fell forward.

And the man pulled her away. His strength was gone, his life was gone, all he could do was pull. And he pulled the Kaffir woman as reverently as he'd have done his own sister. Pulled her and staggered over stumps and stones. Pulled her to hide her from the ants and blazing sun. And over her he built a tossed-up cairn of stones.

And the man knelt down and prayed—prayed as he'd never done since those years before in London when help meant a matter of standing at a door and whistling and pleasure and comfort were only a minute off.

"God," he asked, "help me to be bad. I've prayed to be good in my own way and I've wanted to be good, but you've not heard me. Help me now my last day to be bad. Let me be bad. Let me have one last fling. I'm going. I have to face it. Give me the strength to do one devilish thing."

The man stood up, knelt down and kissed the pile of stones in crazy reverence. Then moved away.

The earth was burning, the sand a mass of fire, the man stepped over skeletons and over bones of many things. With naked feet kicked heads from necks and ribs from whitened frames. *Pah!* what were burned human beings, what starved and tortured ones? What? And tomorrow he'd be one. The man laughed squeakily, and each laugh shook his flickering life.

Little Africa, in death there's less than any think. Death is nothing—only the end of something.

The man laughed, sobbed, kicked at the dried-up carcasses. Touched them. Poked at them. Picked up dried bones and threw them like a boomerang. Talked to them. Talked till his lips went cracked and sound was almost past forever. Then the man stooped a weary back and picked a head from a much more shriveled body. And in his craziness he looked at it and saw that the sunken cheeks were simply whole dry flesh.

Little Africa, this isn't pretty, but the truth sometimes is hard to hear. The man took that head home to the place he might yet live in for one more night and for a while gloated over it. A human head, a head like his, a skull! That which we all must go to, and he—he had to go. The end of everyone, and he to follow just as surely as the sun would rise next day.

The man fingered the head, felt it, caressed it, smelt the dry flesh and laughed at it. Turned to his starving dog and let her smell it.

And with trembling limbs he found a ladder to fix the skull above his store that death might be above and death within.

The man put the skull on the peak of the grass roof, and came down and stared queerly up at it. Looked at it and saw himself as he would be in but two days or less.

Little Africa, do you ever see that you are but the living, throbbing thing outside a skeleton?

The man looked up, walked in the store, staggered. Looked at the useless whisky and the empty shelves which should hold food. Stroked his feet and twiddled his toes as a man who must do something. The man counted the whisky bottles—counted them seventy-two—dry eyed, counted them eighty-five—dead eyed, counted them ninety-six—dry mouthed, cracked-lipped, tried to see the humor of them. A hundred and five in the shade, no food again forever, whisky which boiled and steamed in the bottles!

And the man stroked the bottles and saw, through burning eyes, the days in the old Savoy and the same old Pavilion and the same old times when the crook of a finger meant instant attention. Stupidly, he stood away and awkwardly made the same old motions and mumbled to himself.

There's no harm in being a fool on the day you die, Little Africa, is there?

The exertion tired, and the man slopped back onto the stretcher in the end of the store. The stretcher burned like living fire, but he was too far gone to worry. Just lay and looked, dry eyed, up at the dry tarantulas hanging listless above him.

The man half died, and in his death he heard the little mother dog call to him. Still looking at the roof, he told her of his helplessness. The little woman hadn't the strength to rise on her hind legs to lick his hand: hadn't the moisture on her tongue to lick at all.

"Girlie," the man said feebly, "we're all going out, but you won't suffer. Wait just a while till I have a rest and get the strength to pull a trigger. You and your babies will go out with me."

THE dog looked up at her God and whimpered, then saw the man was almost out and, with the intuition of a woman, left him. Her puppies, in the awful heat, lay as they'd have lain forever if she hadn't gone numbly to mother them.

The man hazed off, and in his haze was once more back with the crowd. Was at Kempton Park at the races and playing billiards and watching the Oxford and Cambridge boat race and doing Monte Carlo all in a congested, overlapping muddle. Thinking sixteen things at once and thinking nothing. And Mabel and the Carlton and the Cecil and Goodwood and Her.

And Him.

Five years married and all the world to make a happy stage of. And him! His boy! His son! His earth! His Heaven!

And then the other him! And the shame he'd rushed away from.

Little Africa, the strange twists of life are not in books; they really happen. We can't make them or unmake them. It isn't destiny or fate, or anything else. Twists are twists and we can't evade them.

And I don't think that our great God would want them different. It's just the way it is.

In his haze the man heard the suffering mother dog whimper, heard a curious bumping, thumping, rumbling. And the man with a half gone wriggle turned to one side.

Little Africa, some things are nasty. The man's dry eyes cracked as they opened, wondered, burned and maddened.

For the skull had fallen off the roof and the hunger-crazed dog and her pups were worrying at it.

The man tried to hurry up and his legs refused. He tried to shout and his lips refused. He tried to pray and his Gods were mixed.

And he clasped his head and his hair seemed to fire his hands.

And the man felt—*felt!* Felt for he knew not what. Just felt. And he found it and rolled off the stretcher.

I've done it myself, Little Africa, but not that way. He rolled because death was near. And he crawled and pulled himself along—pulled with a desperate wish to do one thing. Crawled and dragged his body half groveling on the ground. Slumped his stomach and lifted it, tore a cheek on the rough ground and didn't feel it. Ripped a hand.

"Girlie," he said to the dog as he got to her, "you and your babies mustn't do that. All's fair in love and war and in death and for the sake of babies. But you mustn't do that."

The dog tried to lick his cheek with the tongue that had chewed the dry head and the man couldn't hold her off.

"Keep away," he said in a silly sort of command, and flicked at her with the strength of a fly.

The pups kept worrying at the head, and the man rolled on his back. Stupid as a calf, he didn't seem to know what he was doing, yet meant to do it. And he got the head.

The man held the horrid thing a moment, and the weak pups couldn't jump high enough to touch it. The man looked at the torn, dried skin and the horror of it—looked at the white teeth and the ghastliness. Looked at a woman and the life that might have been and the ghastliness that was. Laughed!

Then the man felt again for the thing he'd carried and dropped.

With muzzle almost to body, he shot—shot, Little Africa, and killed the mother and the pups.

And he lay on his back, Little Africa, and clasped the skull to his breast. Clasped it and hugged it and spoke to it words of love. Called it a name that was as dear that day as it had been years ago. Loved it and petted it—the skull of a dead, dead woman. Caressed it and fondled it and spoke secrets into a dried-up ear. Held it away and looked at it enamoured—drew it back to him and kissed it. Put it inside his shirt and clasped his left arm round it. Lay back exhausted from the violence of his stored-up love.

And the man's right hand searched for the revolver, found it, lifted it, waveringly aimed it. The hand went limp, the revolver rolled from off his chest. The coma of death had come.

THE special coach carrying its own provisions drew up at the front of the store. Four persons hastily alighted. Capeboy driver and Kaffir jumped down and attended the mules.

The four hurried over to the veranda of the store and stood round the prostrate man. One man knelt down.

"Dead?" one asked. "Too late?"

The kneeling man shook his head dubiously.

"Practically the same thing as dead," he announced.

The man worked over the prone body for a moment, injected something, poured something into the mouth, then signed to the rest to help. Together they carried the senseless bag of bones into the store and laid it on the stretcher. And for two long anxious days and nights one or other of the four watched it and fondly attended it. And on the third day there came sunrise.

The insensible man's dry eyes slowly opened. Half crazy they stared up. And the man knew that he was dead and he knew that he was in Heaven.

For the dry, half crazy eyes looked into the eyes of a woman.

Of a woman who, deep in her heart of hearts, had never once ceased to love.

HOPS

By Preston Langley Hickey

STRANGE deeds transpire
Where the midnight fire
Of the hop-pipe lanterns glow.
And misty shapes,
Like cringing apes,
Go flitting to and fro.

There is beauty rare
In the smokers' lair
Where the opium tapers blow.
And the fallen sigh,
And some men die,
As the fancies come and go.

For the dreams they dream
Are dreams of love,
Of memories fond and sweet.
Then they wake in the gloom
To their earthly doom
And totter away to the street.

And the souls that sigh
In the night, and die,
To the land of their dreams are bound.
For their bodies stark
'Mid the damp and the dark
'Tis a city's nameless mound.

But the ones who are left
With the coming of night,
Are back to their cribs in the wall.
Then—the picture fades
I awake with a start—
'Tis a dream I have had—that is all."

This Uncanny Story Will Give You a "Creepy" Thrill

A GAME OF CHANCE

By HENRY LIEFERANT *and* SYLVIA B. SALTZBERG

THERE is an artificial quiet about the wards of a hospital more oppressive than the muteness of the dead. But the silence of a laboratory speaks! The centrifuge whirls in frenzy at your touch, a dancing dervish yielding to the breath of his god. The glassware tinkles like the joyous laugh of a child at its mother's approach. Incubator doors open wide, saying, "Here are treasurers. Dig and find!"

I worked late that night, later than usual. Free at length from the interruptions of a feverish day, I felt reasonably certain of my security. True, for the night I was riding fourth 'bus, as we term an assignment to the fourth ambulance, but only in an extremity would I be called out. One day an excursion boat disgorged its passengers half a mile out in the bay. Every ambulance in the city took its turn, then, even the obsolete one-horse contraptions of the last generation. Only a month before, a ten-story, widely advertised bakery in the neighborhood—

Days after, the emergency wards reeked with the odor of burnt blood.

Selfishly, I admit, I hoped that the night would pass without a community misfortune. Enough of individual calamity had already crowded my day to capacity. My fellow internes accuse me of keener interest in the human angle of a hospital than in the medical. I accept their banter with amusement. I have never confided to any of them the problem that calls me to the laboratory every night.

I picked up another length of glass tubing, held it in the flame to the point of fluidity, then, with a quick movement, spun it out to the desirable length. A neat pile of these capillary pipettes,

made in spare moments, lay spread on a bed of cotton batting beside me, glistening, flexible, attenuated bits of glass thread drawn from a matrix of coarse glass tubing. In this fashion, too, had some master hand-moulded that girl with whom I had been talking during visiting hours—held her in the fires of experience to the point of dissolution, then twisted her sharply to a sensitive, fine-spun, fragile point, a vessel for poison or elixir as chance might provide. She had had no visitors. A tribute to the innate tenacity of the human organism it was, that the blow of the man she called her husband had not killed her. Spun glass with the strength of steel.

The far-off rattle of dishes from the kitchen preparatory to the serving of a midnight meal to the night staff emphasized my isolation. I decided to dispense with this midnight exchange of pleasantries. Peace and the comfort of undisturbed pursuits filtered through my tired brain. A glorious night of work if I chose to take it! I could wedge in a few minutes of sleep the next day. Even the garrulous morgue-keeper, whose tongue more than compensated for the many dumb ones in his domain and who could be expected two or three times of an evening to warm up, had gone—to visit a married daughter, he said. I remember wondering whether he jounced his grandchildren on his knee, taught them tricks and told them stories as other grandfathers do. Why not? There are men who make a living on hanging!

I pulled down the blue blind with ill-concealed irritation. A white light had suddenly spread over the courtyard and, blending with my microscope lamp, had paralyzed the effects of its rays. In the room where the light appeared lay a large Swede, too big for the ordinary hospital cot. He had been carried in that morning, still talkative. By sundown his jaws wore the grin of death, his limbs were rigid, his eyes glazed. Two days previous, an ordinary carpet tack had pierced his thumb. I felt in my pocket for the morgue key which the keeper had left with me. They might be coming for it any minute now.

Slide after slide, about a hundred in all, passed in review under the eye of my microscope. Gradually, Swede and girl, morgue-keeper, ambulance, hospital, everything dwindled to the relative size of the minute creatures whose habits had absorbed me completely. The organisms themselves—to the naked eye mere films upon a glass slide—usurped, in my world, that night, the place these other people had assumed.

Caught in the attitudes of life by the mordant I had applied, whole colonies of micrococci, villages, towns, and nations, a veritable Pompeii of them bared intricacies of structure heretofore unreported in any journal of bacteriology. Not that I could claim, as yet, to have made a vital discovery. Only the presence of tiny specks on the surface of the micrococci, specks in each cell, consistently arranged in a characteristic formation stimulated my imagination to the point of unreality. Further investigation would be necessary before I could interpret their function. Further investigation—a whole day must intervene, a day of petty routine labors, of hospital rounds, of—

Might they not be the figures of some primitive karyokenetic process? The forces of some undeveloped sex instinct? The *anlage*, as it were?

The blood rushed to my head so that I could no longer see clearly. Door after door of Science swung open at the magic news of my discovery. Rocks moved! Fish talked! A hundred stained slides of *micrococcus haematodes* had conquered the world!

The *whir* of a 'bus engine close to my window, beyond the window, around the corner of the laboratory building to the morgue! The human mind at times is capable of a peculiar dual activity. While the focus of my consciousness centered on the illimitable possibilities of what I suspected was a sexual phase in the development of these lowest of plant forms, in the periphery of my consciousness, I concluded that a new driver must be handling the 'bus. Simultaneously, the two channels of thought continued their parallel course. What if these ultra-microscopic specks were the very entrails of life in its formative stage.

The old chauffeurs knew that the procedure was to turn to the right before the laboratory was reached and draw up at the emergency door, where a porter, summoned by the cacophonies of the 'bus bell would be waiting with a wheeled stretcher. If I asked to be released of a portion of my routine duties, perhaps there would be time to complete my investigations and obtain a hearing at the *National Bacteriologists'* before the end of the year. Credit would always redound to the hospital.

But the bell hadn't sounded! The 'bus had remained at the morgue door! There was the one conclusion.

"Damn that woman!" I heard Gleason say as I came up behind him.

The driver and a policeman who had apparently accompanied them had already tilted the stretcher from the rear of the 'bus. Without commenting on Gleason's remark, I bent over the dead woman. Under a dirty nightgown (probably they had found her so) that clung tenaciously to her body as if it had not been removed for days, the woman's configuration was clearly discernible—swollen legs, distended stomach, bulbous breasts. Soggy skin hung from her arms and cheeks. Her lips, slightly parted in the relaxation of death, showed a marked outline of blue, the purplish-blue consequent to the inhalation of illuminating gas.

I turned on Gleason.

"Damn that woman!" he swore again, more viciously, continuing to brush the dust from his glossy white uniform. "Gas company was there when I arrived—pulmotor brought her around. Damn fool turned up her toes just as the 'bus got started."

THE policeman, making entries in a small black notebook, grinned his assent. Like the mercury in a thermometer, I felt my temper arising to burst its bounds. Gleason was a music lover, or claimed to be. Once a week, he and his fiancée permitted themselves the luxury of a concert. But an interne's salary is hardly elastic enough to include both the fine imposed upon him for bringing in a dead patient, and the price of a pair of tickets.

His reasoning was as ingenuous as a child's. Because one Mary Malloy's burdens had proved unbearable, he and his fiancée would be forced to endure each other's company at home, or in some neighborhood moving-picture house. Damn that woman!

To avoid argument with Gleason, I swung on my heel and followed the stretcher into the morgue. Our feet scraped jarringly on the cement floor. None of the external reverence and awe which custom, or perhaps fear, accord to the dead marked the temporary disposal of Mary Malloy.

"There she goes, boy! Shove 'er in! Watch out for the pigtail—"

"Mary Malloy—age thirty-six!"

The policeman, kind enough to relieve me of the duty, wrote her name on the tag with a flourish, rubbed his hands energetically as if washing them of the whole affair and bade us a cheerful good-night. The chauffeur lifted the heavy zinc cover, rattled it into place, once more tucked in Mary Malloy's recalcitrant braid of thick black hair, then thumped soundly on the cover to insure its stability.

" 'Night, doctor. Guess she's safe!"

"Good-night!"

The discordant clatter of zinc, mingling with our voices reverberated down the corridor, bounded away from the closed metal doors of the locker room

and the autopsy theatre and returned twofold to the morgue proper. Side by side, bottom to top, the niches of the dead were embedded in the cement wall, four rows, five in a row, like pigeon-holes in a gigantic desk. Sometimes, when covers closed the fronts of all of them, they reminded me more of boxes on the shelves of a shoe-shop—all of one size, one color, one shape—with black figuring and lettering for more convenient identification, only that in a shoe shop one pair of shoes occupies one box. Here—new born babies are huddled six and eight in a niche to save room, until a truck from the department of Charities comes to cart them off, and in times of stress, when undertakers are busy—

I let myself into the laboratory by a narrow, almost unknown door connecting the two buildings. Marguerite Judson was waiting for me. All the iciness of the morgue melted from me while I watched from a corner, how she adjusted and readjusted the cap on her shining bobbed hair, cut sharply across the forehead after the manner of little boys. I could see two of her from my hiding-place—one in the flesh, slim with suppressed energy: one in the long glass door she was using as a mirror.

"I'm on duty in Ward Six tonight," she would say when I "hem"'ed or "boo"ed at her from the door. "I saw your light burning. Everybody's asleep —I thought I'd come down."

Silly play-acting, of course—as if she didn't know that apologies were unnecessary—but nevertheless a delightful opening for whatever we had to say to each other. Unfortunately, she had been on night duty for a month, and I on day.

I resolved to remain concealed for another few moments until the cap should conform to her idea of what would attract me most. It would be too cruel to her to appear before. Then, entirely without forethought, my gaze wandered off to the table where I had left the tubes with which I had been working.

"Marguerite Judson!" I bit out sternly.

She shrank against the wall—covering her mouth with the back of her hand in fright.

I cleared the room in two strides. "You nurses could drive a corpse mad!" I cried. "You've disarranged my tubes. Thought they were gorgeous colors, I suppose, thought you'd like to play with them! In the operating room you're afraid to touch an instrument. You women! Ugh!"

Up went Marguerite Judson's head. Her sudden recuperation should have been a warning. Had I called her an incompetent individual, or a meddling female, she might have humbled herself sweetly, and later proved to me the injustice of my opinion. But when a man incriminates the whole of womankind for what a woman believes is some personal fault of her own—

On behalf of her sex and her profession, Marguerite Judson slammed the door.

In a fury I swept my disordered tubes back into the incubator. I pulled out my watch. Two o'clock! At that hour the omnipotence of *micrococcus haematodes* no longer seemed a thing of the immediate future. Work—work—and years of harder work! A cutting wind blew in from the morgue under a crack in the door. It cooled my puerile anger.

Marguerite Judson, I felt convinced at the time, would never talk to me again. Why had Mary Malloy resorted to suicide? Gleason would sing to another tune in the morning when the *Local News* appeared with a sob-encrusted account of the valiant young ambulance surgeon who had fought tirelessly to save the suicide's life!

I was tired, dead tired. To another in my state I could have given sound advice, but because I had goaded myself beyond the point where exhaustion ceases to be exhaustion and becomes nervous irascibility, I cast about persistently for some interest to keep me awake. The silence of the laboratory taunted me now. Still it said, "Here are treasures. Dig and find." But I knew that I could not dig and find unless I insured myself against interruption.

I walked through the laboratory closing up for the night, unwilling to leave, hoping against hope that something would detain me. A guinea-pig I had bled late in the afternoon squealed like a rubber toy at my approach. I fed him a few lettuce leaves and a handful of oats. Two white mice, who should have been torpid with pneumonia were chasing each other up and down the miniature stairs in their infirmary. From the confines of an alcohol jar, the lidless eyes of a two-headed infant monster followed me about uncannily.

ALL at once the muteness of the morgue enticed me. I had no business to go up to my room, after all, for on the autopsy table the keeper had left for me the disemboweled body of a woman, the cause of whose death the coroner's physician had been unable to discover. I had a theory about that woman.

The morgue keeper would be down early next morning to sew up the coroner's cut, lest his infraction of the rules be discovered by some early-prowling undertaker. The woman's family would come for their dead. I only wanted her heart, anyway. The woman's family? As I returned to the morgue, locking the little door behind me, I recalled what the hospital historian had told me of the family. Likely as not, she would be in her niche another day or two until the matter could be settled amicably. Two men had come to the office, each within a short time after the woman's death, each with a marriage certificate and several pictures, each claiming to be her husband. Would the third man, under whose name she had entered the hospital, assert his rights in the morning? Had there really been a third man?

I switched on the white lights. Another gust whirled through the morgue, twisting and turning the tags on the covered pigeon-holes until their scrapings against the metal sounded like the gnawing of rats from within.

The odor of death, obstinate despite disinfection, more obstinate now because of the unced cadaver exposed all day, seemed to saturate my clothes instantly as a single plunge into water will saturate them. From the center of the slate table a drain pipe dripped a mixture of clotted blood, body fluids, and water into a tin pail below. I found myself crossing the morgue to the steady rhythm of it. *One*—two—three—four! *Drip*—drip—drip—drip!

Some facetious nurse, wearying of the endless one-inch bandage and square knot, had tied the woman's jaws with a three-inch bandage, securing the band by a flippant bow over the left ear. Instead of the usual impression of a corpse with a tooth-ache, the variation in method produced a corpse decked out for a party. In the recurring drafts that whistled through the door, the blood-stiffened ends of the bow fluttered and grazed each other. Contrary to rules, a pair of imitation jade ear-rings and a ring to match had been left on the body. The right arm dangled limply over the edge of the table. It interfered with my work, annoyed me, in fact, for it scraped against my trousers every time I bent over, like fingers trying to pick my pocket.

I lifted out the woman's heart. I examined it. In the gross, nothing was to be seen. I weighed it in my right hand. Normal to the touch, yet—inside —I suspected that Becker at St. Sebastian's would be profuse in his thanks for that heart.

Quite suddenly, then, as a dog will bark at some unseen danger, or a cat arch her back, my hand remained sus-

pended in mid-air. I knew that I was not alone! *One*—two—three—four! *Drip*—drip—drip—drip! All doors were locked. The dead were—dead. Yet I knew that I was not alone. Close upon the conviction came the sound of footsteps in the corridor, of short, labored breathing, of heavy bodies zig-zagging, it seemed to me, now to one side of the corridor, now to another.

What could I do? I slipped the heart into my coat pocket. Where could I hide! I did not believe in spectacular heroics. When I learned the purpose of the intruders there would be time enough to sound the alarms. I slunk into the only shadowed and sheltered corner of the morgue.

The footsteps, close upon me, halted. Voices:

"She's mine, I'm tellin' yuh!"

"The devil she is!"

"We'll see."

Over the autopsy table the two men leaned with ghastly unconcern. I could not see them well, but their necks, red, thick and dirty, told the story of their faces. The first speaker opened his mouth. The smell of whisky reached me. His tongue bunched and stumbled.

"All dressed up, ain't yuh darlin'?" he whined, fingering the spattered bow. "All dressed up and waitin for me, eh?"

I fancied his voice, clouded though it was, boasted a tinge of triumph. The other fellow's head rolled unsteadily.

"I got pictures," he mumbled. "Pictures 'n everything. You ain't gonna—I tell yuh what!"

Something, at the moment incomprehensible to me, passed between the two sotted figures. In a trice they were kneeling. The table cut them from my view. The rattle of small objects, perhaps buttons or stones, rose sharply above their asthmatic wheezing. Buttons, or stones? Curiosity made me bold. I took a step out of my corner. Neither man noticed me. I took another, then another. I was behind them!

Drip—drip—drip—drip! *One*—two—three—four! Under the very pendant hand of the woman, the two men were shooting dice!

I fingered the heart in my pocket. Through a life-time it had been the physical symbol of what these men desired. Over and again the dice fell sharply on cement. Now one man leered with approaching victory. Now the other snatched it from his grasp. Oaths filled the gaps. The ring of metal startled them. They looked around, fortunately not in my direction. The bit of imitation jade set in gold dropped from the woman's finger!

"You talkin', babe?" the loquacious one laughed raucously at his own humor. He gave the hanging hand a generous squeeze. Once more their heads swayed toward each other. More desperate rattling of dice! The game resumed!

I have no standard to judge the passing of time. The far-off rattle of dishes announced preparations for the last meal of the retiring night-staff. A 'bus bell clanged. A light in the maternity operating room blazed. I turned up the collar of my meager twill coat. The tension became unbearable.

Slowly, cautiously, a half-foot at a time, I edged toward the door. Concentration engulfed the men.

One—two—three—four. *Drip*—drip—drip—drip! It struck me that the joy of the winner would be an unholy sight. I could not stay.

My fellow internes, I think I've told you, accuse me of unscientific reactions.

SOLUTION

THE ghostly fire that walks the fen,
Tonight thine only light shall be;
On lethal ways thy soul shall pass,
And prove the stealthy, coiled morass,
With mocking mists for company.

On roads thou goest not again,
To shores where thou hast never gone,—
Fare onward, though the shuddering queach
And serpent-rippled waters reach
Like seepage-pools of Acheron,

Beside thee; and the twisten reeds,
Close-raddled as a witch's net,
Enwind thy knees, and cling and clutch
Like wreathing adders; though the touch
Of the blind air be dank and wet,

As from a wounded Thing that bleeds
In cloud and darkness overhead—
Fare onward, where thy dreams of yore
In splendour drape the fetid shore
And pestilential waters dead.

And though the toads' irrision rise,
As grinding of Satanic racks,
And spectral willows, gaunt and grey,
Gibber along thy shrouded way,
Where vipers lie with livid backs,

And watch thee with their sulphurous eyes—
Fare onward, till thy feet shall slip
Deep in the sudden pool ordained,
And all the noisome draught be drained,
That turns to Lethe on the lip.

—From "Ebony and Crystal," by Clark Ashton Smith.

Hideous Death Lurked at

THE OPEN WINDOW

A Wild Yarn

By FRANK OWEN

IT WAS John Stepplinq who first introduced me to Lotario Pelegin. I remember the night well; a wild desolate sort of night. a night which seemed to engulf the great city in all the uncanny lonesomeness of desert and wilderness.

As our hands met in a friendly clasp, I looked into Pelegin's eyes, and as I did so I involuntarily shuddered. There was nothing repulsive about the face, and absolutely no reason whatsoever for my action. At the moment I attributed it to the peculiarly weird character of the night which had, I believed, affected mine.

Pelegin was the type of man who balks description. To really appreciate his extreme eccentricity, one would have had to behold the furtive look of half-hidden terror in his eyes. His age may have been anywhere from fifty to seventy, for when one really lives it is possible to crowd a score of years into a single decade.

I can see him now, standing tall and gaunt before the huge open-fire. with great dark circles under his jet-black eyes, serving to make almost ghostly the yellow whiteness of his haggard, deep sunken cheeks. His hair was straight and black, seeming to suggest an Oriental nativity. He was dressed all in black, his vest buttoning high up to the neck and his coat hanging almost to the knees, serving to give him a rather clerical appearance.

At the moment, to which my thoughts revert, we were discussing immortality.

"Only an atheist," declared Pelegin, in a soft, faintly-accented, nervous voice, "is afraid to die. Fear of death presupposes a faith founded on doubt."

"Tell me," said I, "do you fear death?"

"No," he replied, "I fear life. Death is a necessary evil. When one has experienced every emotion it is right that death should result, since life thereafter would be but repetition. One cannot repeat an emotion. To be forced to live forever would be the nearest thing to Hell to be found on earth. For my own part I have

always considered the fate of 'The Wandering Jew' the most terrible in fiction."

A sickly smile passed over his face as he spoke.

"And yet," he continued, "it is odd how tenaciously people cling to life who profess not to care for it. If it will not bore you I will relate an incident which happened in Central India several years ago."

He did not wait for our acquiescence but plunged at once into his story:

"For five months I had been in India and the frightfulness of the climate had almost torn out my nerves by the roots. Day after day passed by in a monotony which cannot be described. Rolf Simmons and I had plunged into the heart of India, he to explore and I to paint pictures. It had not been our intention to remain more than sixty days at the outset, but Rolf had broken his leg and so our stay was lengthened by necessity. . .

"The incident I am describing happened on a night following a particularly trying day spent in the bush. Tired out both mentally and physically, I threw myself upon my cot without even removing my clothes. I was worn out with fatigue. Ambition had left me. And yet I could not sleep. I rolled and tossed upon my cot, gazing with burning eyes into the mysterious blackness of the oppressive night. The air was close and lifeless. My head throbbed with pain and my body seemed possessed of a blazing fever which rendered rest impossible. . . . Toward midnight a faint sound broke the awful silence. I raised myself upon my elbow and listened, every nerve alert. The seconds sped by and all was still.

"'Nerves!' I muttered in a tone of disgust, and my head slipped back to the pillow.

"But almost as I spoke, the sound was repeated and in the utter solitude it seemed weird and unearthly. Then abruptly it ceased. And now the danger, if danger it were, seemed to have increased a hundredfold, for there was no way of telling in what direction it lay. It existed. But where?

"And then, suddenly, without warning, a piercing, fiendish shriek rose upon the air and echoed wildly through the jungle. My lips went white, and, trembling in every limb, I sprang from the cot, seized a repeating rifle which lay within easy reach and rushed out into the blackness of the night. For about a hundred yards I ran, and then I tripped over something soft. I dropped to my knee and ran my hand over the object. By the khaki suit I identified the prostrate body of Rolf Simmons. A deep ghastly ridge encircled his neck. He was quite dead. . . .

"And now the moon, which had been hidden behind a cloud, gleamed forth in all its brightness as though to make some slight amends for its previous negligence. If such were the case, it accomplished its purpose, for, outlined against the curtain of jungle, was a dark figure, presumably a man, and yet it did not seem to have a face—just two wicked eyes gleaming out of the blackness. Even as I discovered it, I darted in pursuit. This was my prey! Revenge! The word seemed written in blazing blood before my eyes.

"The next moment the form had disappeared into the jungle, behind the curtain of blackness. Desperately, insanely, I sped after it. It seemed like a return again to the dark ages when primitive man fought primitive man; where the battle for existence was waged and only the fittest survived. And so the two of us rushed blindly into the dense maze of jungle, and anon we came to the border of a swamp. The Thing did not stop, but rushed headlong into the heart of this region of sickening, gurgling mud. A damp, nauseating vapor rose from the ground which appeared to have been boiled in the sun all day and not even yet to have entirely cooled. We had traversed, miraculously perhaps, half a mile of swamp-land without mishap, when suddenly, without the slightest warning, one of my legs sank with a purling splash almost up to the knee. Instantly, as it did so, I grasped wildly above my head and succeeded in getting a grip on the overhanging branches of a huge tree.

"I could feel some kind of a slimy insect crawling over my hand, but I had no time to brush it off, for the moment I became aware of it two arms grasped my leg, the one which had sunk into the mud, and pulled down upon it with devilish strength. By the light of the moon, which flickered faintly through the branches far above, I could dimly make out the terrible, repulsive figure of the Thing. It seemed to be half dog, half man and smeared with slime from head to foot. But the chief points of repulsion were the eyes, which glittered in the semi-blackness like the eyes of a cheetah, and the teeth, which resembled the fangs of a hunger-crazed wolf.

"Such was the loathsome beast, a human octopus, which was grimly twining its arms about my knee. The mud half submerged the bloated body, and slowly, gradually, it was sinking lower and lower into the bottomless bog. And as it sank, it pulled me steadily down with it."

"I WAS in a quandary. What should I do? Ponder as I would, I could find no way out, and then finally Fate decided for me.

"The beast lowered its head and buried its fangs in the calf of my leg. As it did so the last vestige of civilization flickered from my body. I was now not only the primitive man but the savage also. Emitting a low cry, I drew back my one free foot and let drive a backward kick which struck the Thing square in the face. I laughed softly, viciously, as I heard the bones crack, and the slimy arms fell limply from my leg.

"The fight with the beast was at an end; I had now to subdue the swamp. I struggled, strained and pulled with all my strength to get my leg free. The sweat poured from my body in streams, my veins stood out on my neck like whipcord, my breath came from my lips in short quick gasps. For hours, it seemed, the grim, unequal fight went on. I grit my teeth and would not give up.

"My strength was fast running low, when suddenly it seemed as if I gained a trifle. It was not much ground to win, but it still was something. It was sufficient to rekindle hope, and I brought all my strength together for one mighty effort. The strain was terrible, but the end was accomplished. I freed myself from the swamp. One victim had been snatched from the horrible mud, but it vented its anger on the one that remained. Already the slime had reached its neck and was fast rising up to its mouth.

"A shudder passed over me as I gazed at the loathsome face, now a mass of blood. And the mud rose above the mouth, crept to the nose, the eyes, the head. Then came a series of bubbles, and all was still. In the distance an owl hooted dismally. The horrible life had come to an end. The swamp had reclaimed its own."

PELEGIN paused for a moment, then he said:

"That, gentlemen, is my story. I have simply repeated it to prove my point—that one clings to life even though one longs for death. I cannot recall ever having had a desire to live, and yet a score of times I have fought for life with all my strength. In India, especially, existing had grown distasteful to me. The monotonoy of heat and silence, I believed, was crushing me either toward death or insanity. I can not explain the condition. I suppose it is just another of the many complexities of earth which I have never been able to master. Even at this moment, the craving for life is dead

within me. I would welcome extinction."

As Pelegin spoke, his face blanched and he darted forward and seized Steppling's hand so tightly that the skin turned white. Never have I seen such an expression of terror on any man's face as Pelegin's at that moment.

"Why," he almost shrieked, "why did you open that window?"

For a moment, Steppling gazed on the terror-distorted face in silence. Then abruptly, he walked over and closed the window.

"Had I know that you objected," said he, "I would not have done so."

Lotario Pelegin drew himself together with a visible effort. "On such a night," he faltered, "death lurks in open windows. This is regular pneumonia weather."

But John Steppling had *not* opened the window and I was positive Pelegin knew that Steppling had lied.

LOTARIO PELEGIN was possessed of a strangely magnetic personality. He was not attractive-looking, but he was endowed with a wonderful will power.

Had he cared to study mental telepathy, without a doubt he could have dominated the minds of most of the people with whom he came in contact. Whether or not he went in for this sort of thing I can not say, although there were several authoritative books on the subject hidden away on the shelves in his library.

As the weeks rolled on, an odd intimacy sprang up between Lotaria Pelegin and myself, an intimacy all the more queer because it was *not* intimate. Although we discussed many subjects, we refrained from mentioning our own personalities. I never referred to his past, because it seemed to me that a certain reticence was forced upon me even against my will. It was obvious that he desired to steer conversation away from channels which did not please him, and somehow his will prevailed over mine. Often I was on the point of questioning him point-blank, and yet something seemed to control my speech.

Pelegin lived all alone in a little old house on Thompson Street which had been the dwelling place of authors and artists for more than a hundred years. His studio was on the first-floor front and was filled with art treasures of great value, but what impressed itself most on my mind was the fact that all the pictures hung with their faces to the wall. Once, and once only, I attempted to turn one but I encountered such a look of hatred on Pelegin's face, that I immediately changed the subject; and yet no matter how hard I tried I could not banish it from my mind. The desire to view those pictures became almost an obsession to me. And yet, as I say, I never attempted to turn any, save on that one unforgettable occasion.

One night about half past ten, as I entered Pelegin's studio, I beheld him walking up and down the room as though his soul was in prison. He seemed strangely nervous and in his eyes there lurked a wild brilliancy which suggested insanity. At my entrance, he stopped abruptly in his walk and his face showed plainly that I was welcome.

"To be alone," said he, "at times, is maddening. I sometimes think that the one mistake of Creation was giving man the power to remember past occurrences. After all, when a thing is done, it's done. There matters should rest. But the trouble is in this book of Life, the author has delayed too long writing *'Finis.'* "

Something of his cynicism found an echo in my heart.

"I agree with you," I told him. "A good many players continue to act even after the play is done."

Abruptly, Pelegin changed the subject.

"Come," he suggested, "I am going to finish painting a picture and you can sit beside me while I paint."

On an easel in one corner of the room stood a half-painted canvas. It was a picture of the desert, mound after mound of surging restless sand. Nowhere in the picture was there anything in sight save the sand and the sky. Pelegin seated himself before the picture and I slipped into a great armchair close by.

"To paint in colors by electric light," he declared ironically, "one must be somewhat of a genius."

"To accomplish, possibly," said I, "but not merely to attempt."

He made no answer, but commenced to paint. His manner of blocking in and the speed with which he worked was extraordinary. Not for a moment did he pause to choose a shade of color.

He reminded me of a man who walks down the same path time after time, until his feet have grown accustomed to the road. In his actions there was not the faintest touch of hesitancy. Under his hand, the painted desert changed. The sun died down, swallowed up in a great pall of blackness. And then it seemed as though the desert went mad. Waves of sand formed and swept wildly about like billows of soot.

I know I am describing the picture as though it were an actuality, but to me, at the moment, it seemed so. I could fairly feel the scorch of the burning dust upon my face. My tongue and lips felt parched. Truly, Pelegin was a genius. Never before or since have I been so affected by a picture. I felt as though I would go mad with thirst.

Then Pelegin began to speak. He did not appear to be addressing me. The tone of his voice was almost lifeless.

"And while that sandstorm was raging," he murmured, "I was virtually scalded alive. It was as hot as the interior of a volcano. The tiny bits of sand seemed to burn into my face like chips of glowing steel. And then, in the grayish-yellow blackness, something cold as death and slimy brushed against my hand!"

As Pelegin uttered the last word his voice fairly broke in a shriek. He rose from his seat and stood clawing at the air. As he did so the electric lights went out, plunging the room in utter darkness.

I sat as though stunned for several moments until I could focus my thoughts on concrete things. There seemed to be a draught throughout the room as though a window were open.

Pelegrin yelled, "My God!" and his voice seemed to end in a sickening gurgle as though he were being choked to death by some unseen horror.

And then, suddenly, the lights flared up again. Lotario Pelegin lay dead at my feet.

A deep, ghastly ridge encircled his neck and there was a faint trickle of crimson staining the carpet. But it was none of these things which froze my heart to ice. For what seemed to have sapped all life from my body was this; *While the room had been in darkness something damp and cold and slimy had brushed against my hand.*

I HAVE always believed that the most interesting branch of psychology is the study of how people act under stated conditions.

Had any one told me how I would have acted under the circumstances just recorded, I would not have believed them. I stooped over the prostrate body. Pelegin was dead; of this there was not the faintest doubt. What was I to do?

I realized that if I made the matter known to the police I would be accused of murder, for we two had been alone in the house. Under the circumstances there could be but one interpretation of the murder. So I determined to slink from the house like a thief, unperceived.

And the simile is true, for, before I left, I searched through the drawer of Pelegin's desk until I found his diary. Of course I was committing a crime, but I did so without a qualm of conscience.

I felt as though I could not live until the mystery was cleared. And then my eyes fell on one of the pictures which hung with its face to the wall. Pelegin no longer could protest at my looking. So I turned the picture and eagerly gazed upon it.

It was a picture of a sandstorm, a picture exactly like the one he had just painted for me. And every other picture in the room was of the same subject. Fully a hundred there were in that room. No wonder Pelegin had complained of the repetition of life!

An hour later I was in John Stepling's room at The Logue Club.

"Old man," cried Stepling, "what's the trouble? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

I told him what had happened.

"And when I left," I ended breathlessly, "I brought his diary with me. Perhaps it will help clear up the mystery."

But when we opened the diary we found that it was completely blank except for a few lines which were scrawled on the first page.

"*Guard thy secret from another,*" it read, "*entrust it not, for he who hath entrusted a secret hath lost it.*"

The papers the next morning gave several columns to the account of Pelegin's death. Suicide, they called it, for it seems that in Pelegin's pocket they found a note saying that he intended to die since life had grown wearisome to him. John Stepling smiled as he read the story.

"Pelegin always carried that paper in his pocket," he said. "He hated to live, but he could never summon up sufficient courage to die."

And there the matter must rest. I have never been able to solve the mystery.

Lotario Pelegin was wrong when he said one can not repeat an emotion for I have lived the horror of that night a thousand times over. Sometimes I wake in the hush of the night, my forehead dank with a cold sweat, and I seem to feel a draught against my face as though a window is open. Perhaps I am developing nerves, but nevertheless I am beginning to think, as Pelegin did, that death lurks in open windows.

THE CATALEPTIC

By Charles Layng

DOWN the road there comes a tombstone,
Restless on Saint Swithin's night;
White and ghastly in the shadows,
Gleaming bleakly in the light.

Passing by, I chanced to meet it,
Looked into its eyes of flame,
Then I paused with horror stricken,
For on its face it bore my name.

Horrified, I wandered homeward,
Frightened, palsied, groaning loud,
While my limbs could scarce support me
Agonized, I donned a shroud.

Then a casket rose before me,
Finely wrought in bronze and gold,
It was lovely, for a coffin,
But its sides were dewed with mold.

Haltingly I clambered in it,
Into my unearthly bed,
How vile the smell of funeral lilies,
As they clustered round my head.

Lump by lump, the clods are falling,
Dimmer, dimmer grows the light,
A trumpet blast! Oh, sound appalling,
I am dead, and it is night.

Here's a Genuine "Goose-Flesh" Tale

The Cat Called Carlos

By H. F. LESLIE

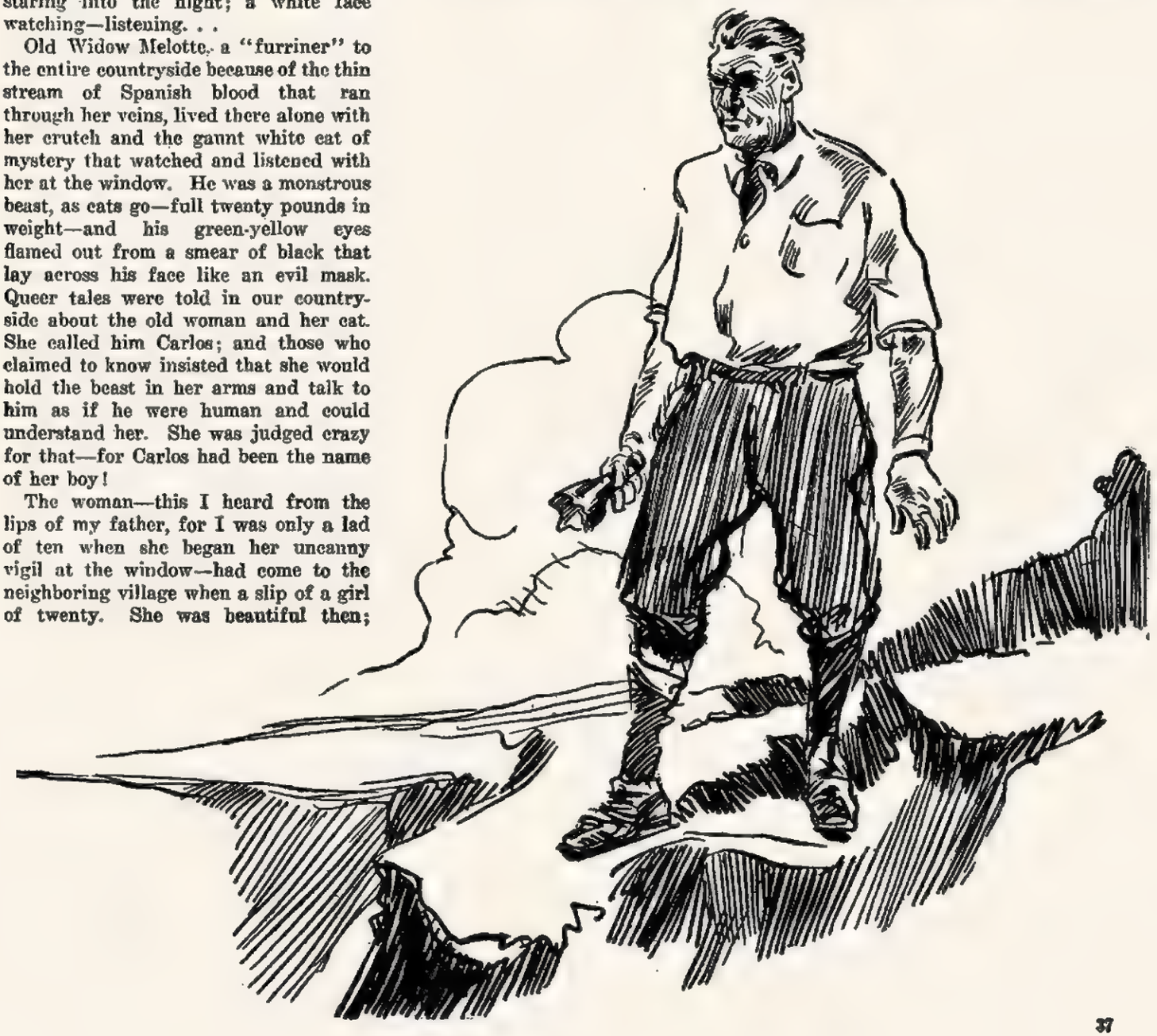
THE old Melotte place was a place of brooding mystery, of silence, and weird shadows crouching.

Never a sound of life came from within its mouldering walls; never a light gleamed from its vacant windows; never a sign in the dark silence told that the place was tenanted—except when the moon would reach a long finger of light down through the pines that crowned the ragged ledge across the road to point out a single window and a white face there, staring into the night; a white face watching—listening. . .

Old Widow Melotte, a "furriner" to the entire countryside because of the thin stream of Spanish blood that ran through her veins, lived there alone with her crutch and the gaunt white cat of mystery that watched and listened with her at the window. He was a monstrous beast, as cats go—full twenty pounds in weight—and his green-yellow eyes flamed out from a smear of black that lay across his face like an evil mask. Queer tales were told in our countryside about the old woman and her cat. She called him Carlos; and those who claimed to know insisted that she would hold the beast in her arms and talk to him as if he were human and could understand her. She was judged crazy for that—for Carlos had been the name of her boy!

The woman—this I heard from the lips of my father, for I was only a lad of ten when she began her uncanny vigil at the window—had come to the neighboring village when a slip of a girl of twenty. She was beautiful then; beautiful with a charm and fire not often found in our quiet country girls. Her dancing feet, the sharp *click* of her castanets, her flashing smile of white teeth between red lips, called a challenge to the young men of the village.

Among them all, the keenest rivalry for her favor lay between big Joe Melotte and the ne'er-do-well Vint Willis. She married Melotte. Willis was a poor loser. Others who had known the warmth of her smile, and had hoped for a time, wished them well and danced at their wedding; but Willis came at the height of the merrymaking with drunken threats in his mouth. In the glow of the moment she defied him, weaving a tantalizing dance before him and snapping her black castanets in his face, until he lost his head and would have laid hands upon her had Melotte not struck him down. They carried him away with his nose on the side of his face from the blow; and next day he left the village.



Melotte took his wife home. A year later the boy, Carlos, was born. And in two years more she was a widow. Strong and unafraid, she lived on and somehow achieved a living for herself and boy from the little farm.

The man Willis stayed away for a dozen years; then he came back. Fearing the ridicule of those who would remember his wrecked face and that wedding night, he built himself a rough camp in the woods and lived there alone. He tried to establish himself in the favor of Widow Melotte; but she would have none of him. It became his habit to sit brooding in the shadow of the pines atop the ledge where he could look down upon the woman and her boy at work in the fields.

Carlos was fourteen then—old enough to carry his dead father's gun and supply their frugal table with what game the woodlands afforded. Willis was a drunken loafer with a great passion for hunting and fishing. He won the boy—could show him where big trout lurked in hidden pools; where partridges fed in alder swamps and on secluded ridges; thickets where the deer hid cunningly. The evil spell of the man was powerful, and many a stolen visit the boy made to the camp in the woods.

I was only a lad of ten when Carlos met his death. That was more than twenty years ago; but if I should live to be a hundred I shall never forget that gray day of tragedy. Father had me with him in the buggy that day. We were coming home from the village, had just topped the rise that gave us close view of the Melotte place, when we heard the woman scream. We saw her leap from the doorway of the old brick house and run swiftly across the road. The red and yellow of her dress looked like a windblown flame as she ran. We saw her stumble among the rocks of the roadside, twist and fall, and then go dragging herself on toward the shadow of the ledge.

We found her at the foot of the ledge among the rocks and brier bushes with her arms round the broken body of her boy, pleading for his voice. Thorns had raked her skin, and the expression of hate on the bloody face that she finally flung back to look at the ledge above us was one to remember until death.

We followed her gaze and saw the head of Vint Willis come sliding slowly into view over the rim of the ledge. Dull comprehension and terror were battling in his ugly crook-nosed face. Then it seemed that every drop of blood drained from his flesh and left it gray as ashes when his eyes met those of the woman. I had a strange fancy that there was an invisible wire from eye to eye and that I could hear the thin crackle of sparks between them. The tension broke when she suddenly flung her arms above her head and snarled some words in a tongue that I could not understand. She fell forward then, upon her face; I thought she was dead.

Father wasted no words. He ordered Vint Willis to come down and help him; and the man came, stumbling down the winding path that led from the ledge top near to where we stood.

The neck of a broken bottle was clenched tight in Carlos' hand, and bits of glass tinkled on rock when father lifted the boy in his arms. The odor of liquor was heavy all around us. Father faced Willis, cursed him; his voice was brittle as hard steel.

"You'll swing for this—I ought to fix you now! . . . Help Mis Melotte there—she's fainted—hurt, too!"

Father started for the house with Carlos. I watched Willis, fascinated by the look on his crooked face. He had not moved, was staring past me. I turned—and I saw a cat, a white cat, half-grown and gaunt, crouching close beside the prostrate woman on the very spot where the boy had lain across the jagged rocks!

The ears of the beast were flat against his snaky skull, his lips drawn away from his teeth in a hissing snarl; and from a smear of black that lay across his face his green-yellow eyes were blazing out upon the man with a look that made my flesh creep. And there Vint Willis stood, swaying uncertainly on his feet and staring at the snarling cat. Then he wheeled with a drunken oath and lurched back up the path. The shadows of the pines received him, and I heard a snatch of maudlin song come drifting down the ledge.

FATHER came back swiftly.

"Where's Willis?" he demanded.

I pointed up the path; and for the second time that day I heard him curse the man. Then he bade me turn the team around and drive back to the village after the doctor while he carried the woman to the house.

I laid the whip on the old mare; and well within an hour I was back with the doctor. I followed close upon his heels when he went into the house with his black bag.

"The boy is dead," father told him.

He had carried the woman to her bed. He led the doctor there, bidding me to stay in the living-room while they straightened her twisted leg. I was afraid to be alone, but I forced myself to huddle in a great chair and wait with fast beating heart for them to finish their work behind the closed door.

Twilight shadows were creeping round me, filling the somber room. The tall clock in the corner began to seem alive as it tolled off the long seconds with slow and hollow voice. Fear grew into terror; and when I saw the eyes of the strange cat blazing out upon me from the shadows at the foot of the clock, I shivered with dread and fled to the side of my father.

They were questioning the woman as to what she had seen atop the ledge; but she held grim silence, speaking only to bid them "no" when they proposed to send the sheriff after Vint Willis. The smouldering fire in her black eyes when his name was mentioned was like that in the eyes of the white cat—fire, yet it chilled me to the bone!

When we reached home, father sent my sister to stay with the woman until she should be able to walk again. Then he took his rifle from the pegs over the door and went himself to the camp of Vint Willis. He found the place deserted, locked. The man was gone.

Willis did not come back. The weeks rolled on to months, and the months to years, and his name became a memory.

The Widow Melotte grew old with the passing of these years. She lived on alone with her crutch and the gaunt beast of a cat—a crazed woman, waiting, watching, listening through the years. And her place fell into decay, became a place of silent ruin by day and of sinister menace when the shadows of night closed down.

Without means, she lived on the charity of the neighbors. It was my duty to carry the milk that father gave to her each day—milk that she divided with scrupulous care with the gaunt white cat! The terror that had gripped me, when in that somber room I had seen the eyes of the beast upon me, never left me. It dried my throat and dragged at my feet on the nights when milking was late and those sinister shadows lay thick about the place when I drew near. I feared to enter the gloomy house, feared with a terror that I could not define. The stagnant night air about the place seemed always charged with grim expectancy.

Often, when I had set the milk upon her table and put my hand to the latch to go, she would hold up her bony hand to bid me silence while she bent her head to listen— listen as she did at the dark window at night! Listen for something she could not quite hear. . . And the gaunt cat would lift his snaky head and listen with her, his green-yellow eyes chilling me to inaction in that uncanny

silence, silence broken only by the hollow beating of the old clock in the corner. Then she would drop her hand and shake her head, and mumble, "Not tonight."

And the clock would echo her words—*Not*. . . tonight! *Not*. . . tonight!

AS I grew older, my nameless dread to enter the place grew upon me; yet through the formless pattern of my fears ran a thread of prickling curiosity. I could not dispel the fancy that I was an unwilling spectator of some weird drama stretching through the years, waiting for some terrifying climax.

There came a night when I was later than usual with the milking, and it was full dark before I set out for the Melotte place. It was a soundless night in mid-August, sultry, oppressive with the promise of approaching storm. There was continuous play of lightning in the western sky, with never a rumble of thunder to break the ominous quiet.

The whole world seemed muffled when I came in sight of the Melotte place. I paused, tried to moisten my dry lips with a dryer tongue while I watched the play of the lightning over the dull gray of the barn and the sullen red of the house itself. The weird glimmer played over the curtainless windows like torchlight over oily pools of stagnant water.

As I drew close to the house, reluctant feet dragging, I saw the old woman's face at the open window, listening—listening for something in the soundless night! So tense was her posture, so wild her staring eyes, that I caught myself listening, too, with bated breath, while a cold hand seemed to brush my spine when I saw the gleaming eyes of the cat close beside her—the cat she called Carlos.

I had never seen the woman smile; but now a slow grimace came writhing over her withered face, a smile of malevolent triumph that made my flesh crawl. Then she nodded her head decisively—and in that dead silence I could hear the muffled beating of the old clock behind the walls, beating words into my straining ears with each measured swing of the pendulum:

Tonight. . .tonight! *Tonight*. . . tonight!

Like a sleeper powerless in the grip of some fantastic dream, I stood there beside the great elm tree. I saw the woman throw back her head and laugh—but no sound came from her throat. She rose from her chair, paused a moment with that unholy smile twisting over her features; then she passed into black shadow beyond my vision. I heard her crutch clatter sharply to the floor.

That sound seemed to break the chains that held me. Like a swimmer up from a deep dive, I shook my head and gasped. I turned to flee the place.

But another sound came to my nervously acute senses, halted my flight before it had begun. It was a cadence of song far down the road, faint upon the still air. It stirred me with elusive memory. . . The tongue of the singer was thick, maudlin the song. Nearer—louder—and in a flash of memory I recognized the voice, the song! I had heard it twenty years ago, drifting down the ledge.

Vint Willis was coming back!

SUDDEN weakness seized my legs; I sank down in the tall grass of the dooryard.

The man passed through the hollow, mounted the gentle hill and came into view. There was stumble and drag to his legs, and little puffs of road dust curled up around his ankles as his feet came heavily down.

My attention was brought back sharply to the house by the *click* of a latch. The door swung slowly open and the woman faltered into view. Her crutch was discarded, and she was clad in a dress of white—a bridal dress! Across her shrunken shoulders, over the shimmering gown, lay a mantilla of black lace. A jeweled Spanish comb sparkled in her hair, and on her hands were castanets! Beside her crouched the gaunt white cat, his green-yellow eyes flaming with baleful fire upon the man weaving his unsteady way along the road.

She stepped out upon the door-rock, unsteadily down to the grass of the path. Then her hands went up, and I heard the *click* of castanets. There was no breath of air astir in the sultry oppressiveness of the night, yet the leaves of the great elm above me seemed to stir with whispering melody, a whisper that set my scalp atingle. Again the castanets clicked sharply—and the strains of a Spanish dance sang through my dizzy brain while those castanets rapped out the emphasis!

Slowly she moved down the path. Slowly. . . Then she whirled out into the dust of the road in the figure of a dance, directly in the path of the approaching man.

He halted, passed a bewildered hand across his eyes, tried to speak. Twice his mouth opened, but no sound came.

She was close to him. A tremor raced through his body, and he found his voice, laughed drunkenly and put out his hands to grasp her. But she eluded him, whirled away while he mounted an oath and stumbled after her.

Elusive as the figure of a dream, across the road, into the looming shadow of the ledge, up the winding path that led to the top she made her way and he followed, stumbling, cursing. . . . And there, on the rim of the ledge against the dark backdrop of the pines, she danced in her wedding dress—danced as she must have danced on her wedding night!

On the dangerous edge of the fall she danced, tantalized the man with mocking shoulders and beckoning arms like two white snakes weaving in the lightning glare. . . .

He leaped for her. She swung away from him. He lurched past her, stumbled on the brink of the ledge, fell to his knees and tottered there—swayed out—out—

In that breathless moment the muffled voice of the old clock came through the walls. . .

The man recovered his balance, dragged himself erect, stood with feet braced wide.

In silent fury the woman hurled herself toward him. He gave back a step. She faltered, swayed; then her arms dropped and she collapsed like a bit of white cloth unsupported.

The man laughed with drunken exhultation, bent to put his hands upon her. Then a sudden cry broke from his throat, blood-chilling in that weird silence:

"My God—Carlos! *Carlos!*"

He staggered back, futile hands clutching at the gaunt white demon of a cat that leaped upon him from the shadows and fastened at his face. He floundered back—back and over the rim of the ledge.

I found my legs then. The suffocating terror that had held me loosed its grip, and I hurried up the path to the top of the ledge.

The Widow Melotte was dead. I found Willis broken on the ragged rocks below, a look of ghastly terror fixed in his glassy eyes and on his ugly, twisted face.

The gaunt white cat—*the cat called Carlos*—had vanished!

A Chilling Tale of Horror
By a Master of Weird Fiction

The Picture in the House

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

SEARCHERS after horror haunt strange, far places. For them are the catacombs of Ptolemais, and the carven mausolea of the nightmare countries. They climb to the moonlit towers of ruined Rhine castles, and falter down black cobwebbed steps beneath the scattered stones of forgotten cities in Asia. The haunted wood and the desolate mountain are their shrines, and they linger around the sinister monoliths on uninhabited islands. But the true epicure in the terrible, to whom a new thrill of unutterable ghastliness is the chief end and justification of existence, esteems most of all the ancient, lonely farmhouses of backwoods New England; for there the dark elements of strength, solitude, grotesqueness and ignorance combine to form the perfection of the hideous.

Most horrible of all sights are the little unpainted wooden houses remote from traveled ways, usually squatted upon some damp, grassy slope or leaning against some gigantic outcropping rock. Two hundred years and more they have leaned or squatted there, while the vines have crawled and the trees have swelled and spread. They are almost hidden now in lawless luxuriances of green and guardian shrouds of shadow; but the small-paned windows still stare shockingly, as if blinking through a lethal stupor which wards off madness by dulling the memory of unutterable things.

In such houses have dwelt generations of strange people, whose like the world has never seen. Seized with a gloomy and fanatical belief which exiled them from their kind, their ancestors sought the wilderness for freedom. There the scions of a conquering race indeed flourished, free from the restrictions of their fellows, but cowered in an appalling slavery to the dismal phantasms of their own minds.

Divorced from the enlightenment of civilization, the strength of these Puritans turned into singular channels; and in their isolation, morbid self-repression, and struggle for life with relentless Nature, there came to them dark furtive traits from the prehistoric depths of their cold Northern heritage. By necessity practical and by philosophy stern, these folk were not beautiful in their sins. Erring as all mortals must, they were forced by their rigid code to seek concealment above all else; so that they came to use less and less taste in what they concealed. Only the silent, sleepy, staring houses in the backwoods can tell all that has lain hidden since the early days; and they are not communicative, being loath to shake off the drowsiness which helps them forget. Sometimes one feels that it would be merciful to tear down these houses, for they must often dream.

It was to a time-battered edifice of this description that I was driven one afternoon in November, 1896, by a rain of such chilling copiousness that any shelter was preferable to exposure. I had been traveling for some time amongst the people of the Miskatonic Valley in quest of certain genealogical data; and from the remote, devious, and problematical nature of my course, had deemed it convenient to employ a bicycle despite the lateness of the season. Now I found myself upon an apparently abandoned road which I had chosen as the shortest cut to Arkham; overtaken by the storm at a point far from any town, and confronted with no refuge save the antique and repellent wooden building which blinked with bleared windows from between two huge leafless oaks near the foot of a rocky hill.

Distant though it was from the remnant of a road, this house none the less impressed me unfavorably the very moment I espied it. Honest, wholesome structures do not stare at travelers so slyly and hauntingly, and in my genealogical researches I had encountered legends of a century before which biased me against places of this kind. Yet the force of the elements was such as to overcome my scruples, and I did not hesitate to wheel my machine up the weedy rise to the closed door which seemed at once so suggestive and secretive.

I HAD somehow taken it for granted that the house was abandoned, yet as I approached it I was not so sure; for though the walks were indeed overgrown with weeds, they seemed to retain their nature a little too well to argue complete desertion. Therefore, instead of trying the door I knocked, feeling as I did so a trepidation I could scarcely explain.

As I waited on the rough, mossy rock which served as a doorstep, I glanced at the neighboring windows and the panes of the fanlight above me, and noticed that although old, rattling, and almost opaque with dirt, they were not broken. The building, then, must still be inhabited, despite its isolation and general neglect.

However, my rapping evoked no response, so after repeating the summons I tried the rusty latch and found the door unfastened. Inside was a little vestibule with walls from which the plaster was falling, and through the doorway came a faint but peculiarly hateful odor. I entered, carrying my bicycle, and closed the door behind me. Ahead rose a narrow staircase, flanked by a small door probably leading to the cellar, while to the left and right were closed doors leadings to rooms on the ground floor.

Leaning my cycle against the wall I opened the door at the left, and crossed into a small low-ceiled chamber but dimly lighted by its two dusty windows and furnished in the barest and most primitive possible way. It appeared to be a kind of sitting-room, for it had a table and several chairs, and an immense fireplace above which ticked an antique clock on a mantel. Books and papers were very few, and in the prevailing gloom I could not readily discern the titles. What interested me was the uniform air of archaism as displayed in every visible detail. Most of the houses in this region I had found rich in relics of the past, but here the antiquity was curiously complete; for in all the room I could not discover a single article of definitely post-Revolutionary date. Had the furnishings been less humble, the

place would have been a collector's paradise.

As I surveyed this quaint apartment, I felt an increase in that aversion first excited by the bleak exterior of the house. Just what it was that I feared or loathed, I could by no means define; but something in the whole atmosphere seemed redolent of unhallowed age, of unpleasant crudeness, and of secrets which should be forgotten.

I felt disinclined to sit down, and wandered about, examining the various articles which I had noticed. The first object of my curiosity was a book of medium size lying upon the table and presenting such an antediluvian aspect that I marveled at beholding it outside a museum or library. It was bound in leather with metal fittings, and was in an excellent state of preservation; being altogether an unusual sort of volume to encounter in an abode so lowly. When I opened it to the title page my wonder grew even greater, for it proved to be nothing less rare than Pigafetta's account of the Congo region, written in Latin from the notes of the sailor Lopez and printed at Frankfort in 1598. I had often heard of this work, with its curious illustrations by the brothers De Bry, hence for a moment forgot my uneasiness in my desire to turn the pages before me. The engravings were indeed interesting, drawn wholly from imagination and careless descriptions, and represented negroes with white skins and Caucasian features; nor would I soon have closed the book had not an exceedingly trivial circumstance upset my tired nerves and revived my sensation of disquiet.

What annoyed me was merely the persistent way in which the volume tended to fall open to itself at Plate XII, which represented in gruesome detail a butcher's shop of the cannibal Anziques. I experienced some shame at my susceptibility to so slight a thing, but the drawing nevertheless disturbed me, especially in connection with some adjacent passages descriptive of Anzique gastronomy.

I had turned to a neighboring shelf and was examining its meagre literary contents—an eighteenth century Bible, a "Pilgrim's Progress" of like period, illustrated with grotesque woodcuts and printed by the almanack-maker Isaiah Thomas, the rotting bulk of Cotton Mather's "Magnalia Christi Americana," and a few other books of evidently equal age—when my attention was aroused by the unmistakable sound of walking in the room overhead.

At first astonished and startled, considering the lack of response to my recent knocking at the door, I immediately afterward concluded that the walker had just awaked from a sound sleep; and listened with less surprise as the footsteps sounded on the creaking stairs. The tread was heavy, yet seemed to contain a curious quality of cautiousness; a quality which I disliked the more because the tread was heavy.

When I had entered the room I had shut the door behind me. Now, after a moment of silence during which the walker may have been inspecting my bicycle in the hall, I heard a fumbling at the latch and saw the paneled portal swing open again.

IN THE doorway stood a person of such singular appearance that I should have exclaimed aloud but for the restraints of good breeding. Old, white-bearded, and ragged, my host possessed a countenance and physique which inspired equal wonder and respect. His height could not have been less than six feet, and despite a general air of age and poverty he was stout and powerful in proportion.

His face, almost hidden by a long beard which grew high on the cheeks, seemed abnormally ruddy and less wrinkled than one might expect; while over a high forehead fell a shock of white hair little thinned by the years. His blue eyes, though a trifle bloodshot, seemed inexplicably keen and burning. But for his horrible unkemptness, the man would have been as distinguished-looking as he was impressive. This unkemptness, however, made him offensive despite his face and figure. Of what his clothing consisted I could hardly tell, for it seemed to me no more than a mass of tatters surmounting a pair of high, heavy boots; and his lack of cleanliness surpassed description.

The appearance of this man, and the instinctive fear he inspired, prepared me for something like enmity; so that I almost shuddered through surprise and a sense of uncanny incongruity when he motioned me to a chair and addressed me in a thin, weak voice full of fawning respect and ingratiating hospitality. His speech was very curious, an extreme form of Yankee dialect I had thought long extinct; and I studied it closely as he sat down opposite me for conversation.

"Ketched in the rain, be ye?" he greeted, "glad ye was nigh the haouse en' hed the sense ta come right in. I calc'late I was asleep, else I'd a heerd ye—I ain't as young as I uster be, an' I need a paowerful sight o' naps naowadays. Trav'lin' fur? I hain't seed many folks 'long this rud sence they tuk off the Arkham stage."

I replied that I was going to Arkham, and apologized for my rude entry into his domicile, whereupon he continued:

"Glad ta see ye, young Sir—new faces is scurce arount here, an' I hain't got much ta cheer me up these days. Guess yew hail from Bosting, don't ye? I never ben thar, but I kin tell a taown man when I see 'im—we hed one fer deestrick schoolmaster in 'eighty-four, but he quit suddent an' no one never heerd on 'im sence—"

Here the old man lapsed into a kind of chuckle, and made no explanation when I questioned him. He seemed to be in an aboundingly good humor, yet to possess those eccentricities which one might guess from his grooming. For some time he rambled on with an almost feverish geniality, when it struck me to ask him how he came by so rare a book as Pigafetta's "Regnum Congo." The effect of this volume had not left me, and I felt a certain hesitancy in speaking of it; but curiosity overmastered all the vague fears which had steadily accumulated since my first glimpse of the house. To my relief, the question did not seem an awkward one; for the old man answered freely and volubly.

"Oh, thet Afriky book? Cap'n Ebenezer Holt traded me thet in 'sixty-eight—him as was kilt in the war."

Something about the name of Ebenezer Holt caused me to look up sharply. I had encountered it in my genealogical work, but not in any record since the Revolution. I wondered if my host could help me in the task at which I was laboring, and resolved to ask him about it later on. He continued:

"Ebenezer was on a Salem merchantman fer years, an' picked up a sight o' queer stuff in every port. He got this in London, I guess—he uster like ter buy things at the shops. I was up ta his haouse onct, on the hill, tradin' hosses, when I see this book. I relished the picters, so he give it in on a swap. 'Tis a queer book—here, leave me git on my spectacles—"

The old man fumbled among his rags, producing a pair of dirty and amazingly antique glasses with small octagonal lenses and steel bows. Donning these, he reached for the volume on the table and turned the pages lovingly.

"EBENEZER cud read a leetle o' this—'tis Latin—but I can't. I hed two er three schoolmasters read me a bit, an' Passon Clark, him they say got draownded in the pond—kin yew make anything outen it?"

I told him that I could, and translated for his benefit a paragraph near the beginning. If I erred, he was not scholar enough to correct me; for he seemed childishly pleased at my English version. His proximity was becoming rather obnoxious, yet I saw no way to escape without offending him. I was amused at the childish fondness of this ignorant old man for the pictures in a book he could not read, and wondered how much better he could read the few books in English which adorned the room. This revelation of simplicity removed much of the ill-defined apprehension I had felt, and I smiled as my host rambled on:

"Queer haow picters kin set a body thinkin'. Take this un here near the front. Hev yew ever seed trees like thet, with big leaves a-floppin' over an' daown? And them men—them can't be niggers—they dew beat all! Kinder like Injuns, I guess, even ef they be in Afriky. Some o' these here critters looks like monkeys, or half monkeys an' half men, but I never heerd o' nothin' like this un." Here he pointed to a fabulous creature of the artist, which one might describe as a sort of dragon with the head of an alligator.

"But naow I'll show ye the best un—over here nigh the middle—" The old man's speech grew a trifle thicker and his eyes assumed a brighter glow; but his fumbling hands, though seemingly clumsier than before, were entirely adequate to their mission. The book fell open, almost of its own accord and as if from frequent consultation at this place, to the repellent twelfth plate showing a butcher's shop amongst the Anzique cannibals. My sense of restlessness returned, though I did not exhibit it. The especially bizarre thing was that the artist had made his Africans look like white men—the limbs and quarters hanging about the walls of the shop were ghastly, while the butcher with his axe was hideously incongruous. But my host seemed to relish the view as much as I disliked it.

"What d'ye think o' this—ain't never see the like hereabouts, eh? When I see this I telled Eb Holt, 'Thar's suthin' ta stir ye up an' make yer blood tickle!' When I read in Scripter about slayin'—like them Midianites was slew—I kinder think things, but I ain't got a picter of it. Here a body kin see all they is to it—I s'pose 'tis sinful, but ain't we all born an' livin' in sin?—Thet feller bein' chopped up gives me a tickle every time I look at 'im—I hev ta keep lookin' at 'im—see whar the butcher cut off his feet? Thar's his head on thet bench, with one arm side of it, an' t'oter arm's on the graound side o' the meat block."

As the man mumbled on in his shocking ecstasy the expression on his hairy, spectacled face became indescribable, but his voice sank rather than mounted. My own sensations can scarcely be recorded. All the terror I had dimly felt before rushed upon me actively and vividly, and I knew that I loathed the ancient and abhorrent creature so near me with an infinite intensity. His madness, or at least his partial perversion, seemed beyond dispute. He was almost whispering now, with a huskiness more terrible than a scream, and I trembled as I listened.

"As I says, 'tis queer haow picters sets ye thinkin'. D'ye know, young Sir, I'm right sot on this un here. Arter I got the book off Eb I uster look at it a lot, especial when I'd heerd Passon Clark rant o' Sundays in his big wig. Onct I tried suthin' funny—here, young Sir, don't git skeert—all I done was ter look at the picter afore I kilt the sheep for market—killin' sheep was kinder more fun arter lookin' at it—"

The tone of the old man now sank very low, sometimes becoming so faint that his words were hardly audible. I listened to the rain, and to the rattling of the bleared, small-paned windows, and marked a rumbling of approaching thunder quite unusual for the season. Once a terrific flash and peal shook the frail house to its foundations, but the whisperer seemed not to notice it.

"Killin' sheep was kinder more fun—but d'ye know, 'twan't quite *satisfyin'*. Queer haow a *cravin'* gits a holt on ye—As ye love the Almighty, young man, don't tell nobody, but I swar ter Gawd thet picter begun ta make me *hungry fer victuals I couldn't raise nor buy*—here, set still, what's ailin' ye?—I didn't do nothin', only I wondered haow 'twud be ef I *did*—They say meat makes blood an' flesh, an' gives ye new life, so I wondered ef 'twudn't make a man live longer an' longer ef 'twas *more the same*—"

But the whisperer never continued. The interruption was not due to my fright, nor to the rapidly increasing storm amidst whose fury I was presently to open my eyes on a smoky solitude of blackened ruins. It was due to a very simple though somewhat unusual happening.

The open book lay flat between us, with the picture staring repulsively upward. As the old man whispered the words "*more the same*" a tiny spattering impact was heard, and something showed on the yellowed paper of the upturned volume. I thought of the rain and of a leaky roof, but rain is not red. On the butcher's shop of the Anzique cannibals a small red spattering glistened picturesquely, lending vividness to the horror of the engraving. The old man saw it, and stopped whispering even before my expression of horror made it necessary; saw it and glanced quickly toward the floor of the room he had left an hour before. I followed his glance, and beheld just above us on the loose plaster of the ancient ceiling a large irregular spot of wet crimson which seemed to spread even as I viewed it. I did not shriek or move, but merely shut my eyes.

A moment later came the titanic thunderbolt of thunderbolts, striking the accursed house of unutterable secrets and bringing the oblivion which alone saved my mind.

Voodoo Doctor Admits Brutal Murder

MISS ELSIE BARTHEL, 28-year-old nurse, of Pittsburgh, was killed by Alonzo Savage, Negro Voodoo doctor, when she refused to give him $295, for "curing her love ills," said a confession which city detectives declare Savage has made.

Under the glare of automobile headlights, Louis Leff, captain of detectives said Savage re-enacted in detail his movments when he met the nurse beneath the portico of a deserted East End mansion.

The Negro confessed that he struck the nurse in the face when she grabbed the money out of his hand; felled her with a brick and then dropped a seventy-pound block of marble on her head. As she fell Miss Barthel screamed, "I'll give it to you," Savage is said to have told the detectives, but the Negro, blood crazy, stepped to the outside of the portico and just as the girl was struggling to her feet, pushed the loose marble block from the wall, crushing the victim's head.

A Tremendous Novel of a Trip to Venus

DRACONDA*

By JOHN MARTIN LEAHY

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SCREAM

WE DROPPED swiftly. Down we went through that attenuated atmosphere which shares but slightly in the planet's axial spin; down into those strata which, with depth, move ever more swiftly to the eastward, and yet from below are *east winds;* and at last into that region of cloud.

"Looks like home," smiled Henry Quainfan.

"Home!" ejaculated St. Cloud. "Good Lord!"

"Well, it's a world—a terrestrial world. Land and water, hills and valleys, forests and mountains—and sun and cloud.

"What's wrong with it, Morgan?" he added.

"Oh, it looks all right," returned St. Cloud. "But—"

He stared down in silence.

"You were butting, Morgan," suggested Henry.

"Yes," said St. Cloud; "I thought of something—but we'll soon be there to see."

The world below had indeed an earth-like aspect, and I wondered if there were any intelligent creatures down there looking up at the *Hornet,* which was descending toward a lake coruscant in the rays of the great Venusian sun. In the east there was a stupendous mountain wall. The height of it was awful. But the point toward which we were descending claimed my attention, and this point was a little island, separated from the mainland by a narrow ribbon of water.

Lower and lower the *Hornet* sank, as gently as a snowflake falling; and at last, with an agitation of tiny trees and of foliage, it came to rest on the landward shore of the island.

Our long journey was at an end. We had traversed that awful and ever-changing gap which lies between Terra and Venus, and were safe and sound—with Heaven only knew what of adventure, discovery (and perhaps horror) before us.

In awe we pressed to the thick glass and looked out upon this alien world. It was indeed as if we had landed in some tellurian intertropical region. Here earth-like trees rose up; the sunlight glittered on the brilliant, luxuriant foliage; clouds dotted the blue immensity above; and the placid sheet of water glimmered in the sunlight.

"Water—trees—beauty—*life!*" murmured Morgan St. Cloud. "God moves in mysterious ways. Perhaps—who knows?—*souls!*"

"Of course," I said.

"See 'em yet, Rider?" Henry Quainfan asked.

"Grin away," I told him. "But would the Creator have made all this," and I waved a hand toward that sunlit beauty outside, "for nothing?"

"If anything is made for nothing, then nothing is made for anything," said he. "But that doesn't prove that this world must be the abode of human beings."

"You'll see."

"Of course I'll see," he smiled.

"By Jo," came St. Cloud's exclamation, "look at that!"

"What?" we asked, moving to his window.

"Look at that Gargantuan Cypripedium!"

"Oh," said Henry, a note of disappointment, I thought, in his voice.

For my part, I wondered what in the world this Cypripedium thing was. I don't know what I expected to see, but what I did see, thirty or forty feet distant in the gloom of the forest was the largest and most gorgeous orchid that any eye ever saw.

"What a beauty!" exclaimed Morgan.

"Planted by the goddess Flora herself," Henry nodded. "But what I would like to see is animal life—something that moves!"

"Of course," concurred St. Cloud. "Haven't seen even a mosquito, though."

"Here's hoping we don't! But what are we staying in here for, bottled up like so many Cartesian imps?"

"What do you think of this Venusian air?" queried St. Cloud. "As dense as some have supposed? If it is, it may knock us flat."

"Nothing like that," Henry told him, "though it may render our breathing more or less difficult. But we'll soon find that out; there's the valve, you know."

Henry moved toward it forthwith.

"Suppose," said St. Cloud, "that we can't live in this world after all, even though it is so much like our own. You know, it is possible that there may be some—"

"Possible but highly improbable," Henry said. "Here goes to see!"

Came a faint hissing sound—which, however, died away almost instantly—and a strange feeling of suffocation in throat and lungs.

"How much more?" said St. Cloud, a little anxiously.

And I caught at that curious change in his voice.

"We've got it all now," Henry returned after a brief pause.

That change was in his voice, too—due, of course, to the density of the Venusian atmosphere.

This change, however, was not one of volume; it was merely a curious reverberating quality, and by no means one pronounced. Indeed, it was faint, elusive as curious; in a time surprisingly short we were unaware of any difference.

Also, that difficulty we experienced in breathing gradually passed away, though this took place much more slowly than the other; indeed, it was some days before respiration became normal.

"Now to issue!" exclaimed Henry Quainfan, leaving the valve and moving towards the door.

St. Cloud and I pressed after him—crowded so close that I fancy we impeded his movements as he proceeded to unloosen the fastenings.

He worked swiftly; that steel-rimmed glass disk moved inward on its hinges—and (romantic vision) Henry Quainfan stuck his head out.

**The first installment of this story was published in the November issue of WEIRD TALES, copies of which can be secured at your Newsdealer for 25c.*

"Hello!" he called out, and for the first time in my life, I believe, I heard awe in his voice.

He looked back at us and smiled.

"Nobody answers!"

"Silent as the grave," Morgan said.

"Well, out we go!" exclaimed Henry.

Even as he spoke, he was on his way; but St. Cloud grabbed him, a little wildly and pulled him back.

"Not like that," St. Cloud told him.

"Like what?"

"Good heavens, there's no telling what kind of a world this is. You want a gun."

"That's right," Henry nodded. "I do, though the chances are that there is nothing dangerous here on this island."

"You can't tell anything about it," said Morgan. "Remember this is not the earth but a world of which we know nothing. There may be boa-constrictors in there," jerking a finger toward the gloomy depths of the forest, "or tigers or arboreal devil-fishes or something. Heavens, who knows what! Wait till I get you a rifle."

"That's right," I said. "For my part, you won't see me out there unarmed."

"I should say not!"

"Of course," Henry nodded.

A few moments, and St. Cloud handed him a Winchester and ammunition.

"I forgot all about weapons," Henry said, clicking in the cartridges.

He waited until St. Cloud and I had loaded our rifles, too, then moved again to the door.

And out he went, while I stood holding his weapon in readiness. Even as I heard his feet touch the ground, his fingers closed on the piece. Wonderful that feeling of security which the touch of a rifle imparts!

He stepped away a few paces. Of a sudden his body came into a slightly crouching attitude, and his eyes leaped hither and yon—over every visible object, it seemed. But as suddenly he drew his fine, powerful form erect, and his lips moved, though no words reached the ear—moved in prayer I should have thought, only Henry Quainfan never prayed.

But this was only for a few seconds. "Come on," he called softly.

I moved back a little from the manhole.

"*Seniores priores*, Morgan," I said.

"I thank you, Rider," he returned in that courtly way of his.

And so the second earth-man set foot on Venusian soil.

I followed forthwith, and as soon as my feet touched the ground I—*danced!*

"I wonder," said Morgan, "if there is anything in there."

As he spoke he made a motion with his rifle toward those gloomy and silent depths of the forest.

Henry, who had been standing silent and moveless, as if his thoughts were mingled with others far away, turned his eyes, though with a somewhat vacuous expression, in the direction indicated, and then, without speaking, he gazed away towards the terrific and cloud-involved heights of that mountain wall there in the east.

If it had not been for this wall, I could have imagined ourselves on the earth.

"Well, we're armed," I told St. Cloud.

"Oh, we're armed, but—"

He left the thought unfinished.

"By Jo!" he exclaimed.

And to my surprise he went stalking off into that gloom which he seemed to dread so much.

For a moment I couldn't imagine what had got into him; then I saw: he was going for that Cypripedium.

"Look out for those boas and tree-octopuses, Morgan," Henry smiled after him.

"I am!"

And he was. But nothing happened. In a brief space St. Cloud was back with that great flower in his hands.

"Did you ever see anything like it?" he exclaimed.

Certainly we never had—nor had any one ever seen its like on the earth. For a little time we stood gazing at its strange beauty. Then Morgan and I began poking around. Henry Quainfan, however, remained standing in the same spot—silent, abstracted.

St. Cloud and I picked leaves, crushing some of them between thumb and finger; we broke twigs, picked up stones, some of which we sent flying out into the water; and we went down to the edge and splashed in the liquid with our hands.

And at last we fell on our knees, and I offered up thanks for our safe journey through the deeps and petitioned a continuance of that Divine protection which had brought us to Aphrodite unharmed, the while Henry Quainfan (to whom this praying was but so much superstition) stood attentive and respectful.

Then I fetched from the *Hornet* the national colors; Henry hastened to cut a pole, and in a few minutes the stars and stripes was raised to the Venusian breeze.

I had just straightened up after making the staff solid when, from out the forest across that narrow sheet of water, there rose an awful and lingering scream, in which there was an elusive throbbing and, it seemed, a ring that was feminine—though I felt certain, what with its awful intenseness, that it could not come from a woman's lips—and which cut and slashed the silence like a knife and pierced to the inmost recesses of our souls.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LIFE THAT MOVES

THE TERRIBLE scream sank—died away. A half minute or so passed, and still all was silent.

"I wonder—" began St. Cloud.

I glanced at him inquiringly.

"It sounded like a woman's scream," he said.

I nodded.

"But it couldn't have been," I told him.

I looked at Henry. His lips severed for speech, but the words that he was about to utter became strange sounds in his throat, for that same sudden and awful scream came again out of the depths of the slumbering forest.

Upward it rushed and up and up, in it that same elusive throbbing which we had detected before. Also, it seemed nearer this time, but I knew that that might be only fancy.

Then suddenly it ceased, as suddenly as it had come, and all was still once more.

"Good heavens," exclaimed St. Cloud, "can that really be a human being in there—a woman? What do you make of it, Henry?"

Henry, who was leaning on his Winchester, shook his head slowly, still gazing in the direction whence had come that awful scream.

"It's no woman," he said. "An animal gave that. Woman!" he ejaculated. "Now, how on earth could evolution—"

He was interrupted by a sharp exclamation from the lips of St. Cloud.

"Look!" St. Cloud cried out. "Look there!"

Before my eyes had leaped to the spot toward which he was pointing, a dull splash came to our ears. Something had leaped into the lake from a wall of rock which, several hundred feet off to the right, rose straight up from the water's edge to a height of twelve or fifteen feet.

The water was deep there, for the thing had disappeared. In an instant, however, it broke the surface and at that same instant another shot out into the air and vanished near the first, which was striking out for our island. Up came the second one, to follow along in the wake of the other.

The water rose in front of them in little waves, which made broken streams that flashed like streams of silver. And upon the heads of these Venusian creatures were the ramified horns of the deer!

I gave a cry of delight and turned in triumph to Henry.

"Deer!" he exclaimed, staring at the things like a man doubting the reality of the images thrown upon his retina.

"Where now is your evolution?" I asked jubilantly. "Where now is your Darwinian pipe-dream?"

Henry looked at me, his face thought-absent, but said nothing.

"Not so fast, Rider," cautioned St. Cloud. "They look just like our common deer, but remember we see nothing but their heads. And as for those horns —well, that doesn't necessitate a direct creative fiat."

"Of course not, Rider," said Henry Quainfan. "You might as well say that the rhinoceros is descended from Triceratops."

A few moments later the animals issued from the water, and in an instant they had vanished into the depths of the forest.

No pursuer had emerged from the trees whence had come that awful scream.

Henry Quainfan turned to me, a smile in his eyes.

"Where, Rider," he asked, "did you see that animal on the earth?"

"Grin away. But they're deer!"

"So they are. And—"

He pointed upward.

"That's sky."

"Just wait," I told him. "Before very long, your evolutionary theories and hypotheses will look like the walls of Jericho."

"One thing's certain," said Morgan, "the scream didn't come from that kind of animal."

"Of course not," Henry said.

"And another thing," added St. Cloud, "why didn't we bowl one over? Venison steak for supper, and we just stood looking!"

"I never thought of that," I told him.

"Same here," said Henry. "But we can get them."

The ripples made by the passage of the animals slowly died away, the water resumed its dimpled smoothness, and a great silence settled down on the wild and lonely spot.

For a time we did not speak; each was lost in his thoughts.

I found it hard to realize that this was not our own world; that the orb of my birth floated through space millions and millions of miles away. I wondered if I should ever return to the earth, and, though it seems very strange, it somehow did not seem to matter much whether I should or not.

And what awaited us here in this unknown land? What denizens dwelt in the gloom of these mighty trees? Were there on this planet also two-legged animals like ourselves? If so, would we fall in love, take and give in marriage? Go out to battle, slay and be slain? Would a day find us again on our own natal planet, honored of men as the greatest discoverers of the ages? Or would we meet death here, far from our own—water roar or slumber over our bones, or blood-dripping fangs tear them asunder?

These thoughts came to me, and many more—thoughts that I could not catch and imprison in words, that seemed the more terrible or beautiful because they were faint and elusive.

What thoughts came to my companions, I do not know. I looked at Henry Quainfan. He stood in the same spot, in the same attitude of profound meditation. And as I looked there welled up in me a mighty admiration and love for this silent and strange friend of mine—the only real friend I had ever had in all my life.

There he stood, silent and leaning on his Winchester, the greatest discoverer of all time. What must have been his thoughts as he stood there! What he must have felt? But he gave no sign. He just stood here, calm and unreadable, leaning on the rifle and gazing with eyes that did not see.

I did not see it coming, nor did St. Cloud, or he would have said something.

My look was on the desolate and awful beauty of that stupendous mountain wall. Oh, the height of it! It seemed it must touch the very stars. In a way, it is the most awful and beautiful thing that I have ever seen—except Draconda.

Suddenly my heart was in my throat, and I nearly jumped straight up into the air. Swinging round, I saw Henry lowering the Winchester from his shoulder and something brilliantly colored, and fifty or sixty feet distant, falling to the ground, where it lay struggling feebly.

We hurried to it.

"By the great Nimrod," exclaimed St. Cloud, "if that isn't a Chinese pheasant's uncle, what is it?"

"Chinese pheasant, my eye!" Henry Quainfan ejaculated.

The bird, which had ceased its struggles, lay breathing heavily and in great pain.

"The poor devil," said Henry, looking at the dying creature ruefully. "We must put an end to its suffering."

Kneeling down, with a quick movement he broke the bird's neck.

This was the first thing I had seen him kill since his boyhood days. In his beliefs, he was a materialist, utter and terrible, and yet he would never go hunting or even fishing, holding it a crime needlessly to destroy any creature. If necessary for food, it was a different matter entirely; but just to satiate that beast which is in every human being—you should have heard Henry express his feelings on that subject.

Never shall I forget the quarrel—a pyrotechnical one indeed—which he once had with a preacher on seeing the man of God setting out with shotgun and hounds for a day's shooting.

"Feathers!" Henry exclaimed, looking down at the dead bird with a curious expression of surprise and bepuzzlement. "What a remarkable coincidence: What a coincidence that evolution has progressed along parallel, identical lines on two planets!"

"Coincidence, my thumb!" I told him. "That evolution business—what is it but moonshine? Before long you'll see that it's so. Just look about you. Look at these trees. There is nothing in them to tell us that we are not on the earth. There are no familiar ones, 'tis true, but we have seen only this one spot. The chances are we'll find them; indeed, I feel sure of that."

"You are so often sure, Rider," he observed with a glint of amusement in his eyes.

"We'll find humans too!" I declared.

Henry laughed.

"You think there is nothing in the Universe greater than man."

And he laughed again.

"That's just what I do."

"No, you go still farther, Rider; you believe that the Universe was made for man. Anthropocentricism! It's funny you don't believe that the world is flat! I tell you what, Rider, man is no more than a butterfly or a canary-bird—except to himself. Remember that: except to himself. He is no more to the Universe."

"That's right," said I; "put the cart before the horse. It's what the Universe is to man."

"Poppycock!" said Henry Quainfan. "The Universe could get along very well without him. Indeed, when he goes down into darkness, the Universe will never know it. Without him—this being with the godlike intellect, which he uses for purposes anything but godlike—without him, the sun would still shine, the planets swing on in their orbits, and the Galaxy would not then go crumbling away to nothing.

"Man just happened to be, that is all; and he happened to be because some ancestor of his—with an intellect only animal—climbed up into the trees, climbed back down and walked upright, and because this was thus and that was otherwise. Ontogeny, geological succession and homological structure, Rider—those are the things that one can't get away from. If each species was separately created by a direct fiat of the Creator, why, Rider my boy, why in the world in a certain stage of their ontogenetic development do all—but we have threshed this out before and threshed in vain. Still, in your mind, man remains the kingpin of the Cosmos."

"Of course. I believe that the soul of one human being is more to the Creator than all His worlds."

"Pickled moonshine!" Henry ejaculated.

"As for your evolution," I said, "you can't even pickle that."

"At any rate, Rider," he answered, "Science sees with her eyes and her brains, while Faith—"

"I know what you're going to say," I interposed.

"While Faith sees with her ears."

I turned to St. Cloud.

"Hopeless, Morgan," I observed.

"Yes," said the dark man, smiling that dark smile of his: "both of you."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE DISCOVERY

"I THINK it would be a good idea," said Henry Quainfan shortly afterward, "to explore our island."

"It would," concurred Morgan. "You know—"

He sent a glance into that silent gloom of the forest.

"There may be something in there," he added, "watching every move we make."

Henry Quainfan slowly turned his look toward that sylvan darkness.

"It's possible," he nodded.

This possibility, though, didn't seem to worry Henry any.

"However," I remarked, "before this exploration of ours begins, we want to get one of those deer animals."

"That's what we do," said Morgan. "I wonder, now, if this Chinese pheasant is good to eat."

"Looks like it," I said.

Henry nodded.

"We can try it, anyway. As for those deer, we'll need only one of them; I'd let the other escape."

"We haven't got 'em yet," St. Cloud reminded him.

"The first thing," said I, "is a knife. Anything you fellows want?"

"Nothing, I guess," answered St. Cloud, "unless you bring me one, too."

"My binoculars, Rider," Henry said. "You know, I may be able to spot one of those tree-octopi in time."

"You may spot something worse than an octopus up a tree," St. Cloud told him.

"I don't doubt that, Morgan. But not here."

"Here's hoping," said St. Cloud.

I entered the *Hornet* and handed out Henry's glasses and a knife (sheathed) for St. Cloud.

Then we started.

We soon found our quarry. We had proceeded as noiselessly as possible, but the animals had heard us, and little wonder; the forest was so thick. There they stood at the water's edge (on the lakeward side), heads up and ready to fly.

I happened to be to the fore as we attained the opening which brought them into view, and taking swift aim, I fired.

"Hit!" I cried.

Bang! went Morgan's rifle in my ear.

"Missed!" he ejaculated, throwing in another cartridge.

His animal was leaping away into the lake.

"Let him go, Morgan," came Henry's voice. "Let the poor devil go. One of them's enough."

St. Cloud muttered something; turning, however, I saw him slowly lowering the rifle.

We pushed forward rapidly, in a few moments breaking from the undergrowth out upon the shingle.

"What a beautiful creature!" said Henry Quainfan, as we hovered about the victim.

"How like," remarked St. Cloud, "and yet how unlike."

He drew his big knife. Bending over, he slashed open the buck's throat, the blood twisting itself this way and that among the stones, like a live thing, to diffuse its crimson in the crystal water—still agitated by the mad dash of that escaping deer, which was headed straight across the lake.

"Venison steak for supper!" said St. Cloud, smacking his lips.

I laid my rifle down carefully (for that weapon was a thing to be carefully guarded now) and began rolling up my sleeves.

"Now to dress our kill," I said. "Then we'll take him in and begin explorations—though I have an idea that there's not much to explore on this island."

"Of course," nodded Henry Quainfan. "And so, while you fellows are busy, I'll look it over."

St. Cloud turned to Henry. He made a couple of passes with his bloody knife in the direction of the trees.

"Don't you go in there, Henry," he said earnestly. "Wait for us. We won't be long. It may be all right, of course, and then it may be infernally otherwise. Good heavens, this isn't the earth!"

"Ta-ta!" said Henry Quainfan, turning. "See you later."

We watched him moving away into the gloom. He stopped, smiled as he waved a hand to us and the next instant had vanished from sight.

"Confound him!" said St. Cloud. "What did he do that for?"

"He could have waited," I returned. "Still—what can there be?"

"This world of Venus, Rider, is as mysterious now—even though we know what it is—as it was when we quitted the earth."

"Hardly that."

"Probably more so, Rider. Heaven only knows what we are going to see."

We set to work, and in a short time we were on our way back to the *Hornet*, I with the dressed deer on my back.

Arrived there, we looked and listened; but the eye caught no sign of Henry Quainfan, and not the faintest sound came from out the forest, save the sad, gentle whispering of the wind.

St. Cloud made a megaphone of his hands and called out:

"*Yo-ho-o-o-o!*"

The sound rolled away into silence; but from the dark recesses of those trees before us, came no voice in answer.

We waited a little while. The silence seemed to grow heavier—oppressive.

Then St. Cloud raised his voice again:

"Oh, Henry! *Yo-ho-o-o-o-o!*"

Still no answer.

"Good heavens!" burst out Morgan.

"I wonder—" I began.

But I didn't know what it was that I wondered.

"Something's happened, Rider."

"Come," said I, starting toward the trees. "This must be looked into."

We moved forward rapidly, but we had taken scarcely twenty steps when a sharp voice came, stopping us in our tracks.

"Hello!" said the voice.

And the next moment Henry Quainfan's face moved into view from behind a tree-trunk.

"Of all the fool things!" burst out St. Cloud—though (I regret to say) with embellishments most forcible. "Why didn't you sing out?"

"Just a fancy of mine."

"Don't have any more fancies like that," I told him. "I thought something had got you."

"No—but I got something."

As he spoke, he raised his left hand.

"What do you think of this?"

St. Cloud gave an exclamation.

"*The* proof!" I cried. "Only a human being could have made it!"

"I knew you'd say that," smiled Henry Quainfan.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DARKNESS FALLS

I STARED at him and then at that thing which he was holding up for our inspection—a small ax or tomahawk, incased in rust and handle worm-eaten and decayed.

"Do you mean to tell me," I burst out, "that you still believe—?"

"This weapon, Rider," he interrupted, "for I suppose it was a weapon, proves that this wild Venusian world is the abode of intelligent beings. But that is all that it does prove. As to what those beings are, it tells us nothing."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, turning the ax over and over in my hands. "It tells me! This is man's handiwork. Look at it! Great Jupiter Ammon, when you see your first Venusian man, I suppose you'll say he's only an hallucination or something."

"If what I see is a *homo sapiens* (or *stupidus*) I suppose I will."

"How about it, Morgan?" I asked.

St. Cloud reached forth a hand for the weapon, which he examined minutely and in silence.

"Strange," he said finally. "And yet not strange, after all. Where, Henry, did you find this?"

Henry Quainfan stuck his thumb over his shoulder.

"In there, over near the other shore. Nearly stepped right over it."

"Maybe," suggested St. Cloud, "there is something else."

But Henry Quainfan shook his head.

"Not in that spot."

"I thought the owner's skeleton might be lying somewhere nearby."

"I thought that, too, and so looked carefully all around. But nothing was there, save what you have got in your hand.

"It's been lying in there for years," observed St. Cloud.

"Of course."

"And its owner?" I queried. "*What* left it there?"

St. Cloud shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows, Rider? Maybe you are right; indeed, I'm inclined to that belief myself; at the same time, though, I don't blink the possibility that its owner might have been something very different."

"Smoke that in your pipe, Rider," smiled Henry. "But come, and I'll show you the spot."

Accordingly we went. But we did not find anything new. We searched the gloomy recesses of that island from one end to the other, but discovered nothing.

When we returned to the *Hornet*, the great sun was sinking behind the tree-tops in the west, the departing rays softening the brilliant green of the foliage and drawing over distant objects a subtile veil of the tenderest violet, rendering them uncertain and lovely as visions seen in a dream.

"Great guns," exlaimed St. Cloud, "evening already! Where has the time gone?"

"How long have we been here?" I asked Henry.

"Don't know, Rider. I forgot to look. It was just about midday when we landed, but we don't know how long it takes Venus to make her diurnal spin—to say nothing of the inclination of her axis. All I know is that the rotation is swift, like the earth's, and that the axis isn't upright to the orbital plane, which gives the planet days and nights of variable length, and seasons."

"As for the seasonal part of the business," I ventured, "wouldn't the compass shed light on that, by showing how far to the north or south of the west point the sun is going down?"

"Hello, Keats!" St. Cloud grinned.

"Rider," said Henry, "remember what Morgan has been pounding into my ear; this isn't the earth. It is the stars that will make everything clear. And on the earth man doesn't get his direction from the compass; if he did, sometimes he would be traveling south when headed north. He gets his orientation from the stars. He can't trust his compass until they have shown him how untrustworthy it is."

"What care we about seasons and stars?" exclaimed St. Cloud. "What-ho for a fire and the sizzle of venison steak!"

"I second the motion," I told him.

"For my part," said Henry Quainfan, "I am going down to the point and scrutinize the shores, like the bear that went over the hill to see what I can see—signs of *men*, perhaps."

And he grinned at me.

Accordingly St. Cloud and I set about to light our fire, while Henry, Winchester in hand, walked to the farther end of the island to sweep the margin of the lake with his powerful glasses.

The fire was going brightly, enhancing the gloom of the trees, when Henry returned.

"See anything?" I asked him.

He nodded, but remained looking at me in silence.

"Anything unusual?" I queried. "You're about as communicative, at times, as the Sphinx."

"I don't know for sure what it is. Let's go out on that rock, and you can see it for yourself."

He turned as he ceased speaking; St. Cloud and I followed.

"There it is," said Henry Quainfan when we had clambered up beside him. "What is that?"

He pointed toward a spot nearly two miles away on the farther shore.

"What is what?" I wanted to know.

For not a sign of anything unusual could I descry.

"There!" said St. Cloud. "I see it—but 'tis gone."

I had been straining my eyes, but not a thing had I seen; and my eyesight is supposed to be excellent. I had just opened my mouth to speak, however, when, above that distant wall of trees, a nebulous something appeared and in a moment had vanished.

"What is it?" Henry asked.

"Smoke!" I declared.

"What, Morgan?"

"Wait a minute," returned St. Cloud, "until it comes again."

"There it is," Henry told him.

There was that nebulous thing again, This time, however, it hovered above the tree-tops for a little space and then slowly drifted away into nothingness.

"It *does* look like smoke," said St. Cloud.

"Of course it is," I declared. "And only intelligent things make fires."

"Funny we didn't notice it before," mused Henry.

"Maybe it wasn't there," I remarked.

"A little while ago," he added, "it was a thin and straight column."

"Let's see the glasses," Morgan said.

"They won't throw any light on the matter, though," returned Henry, reaching the glasses over to St. Cloud. "Probably if it wasn't for this haze—which renders everything so dreamily beautiful—we could come to a positive conclusion."

"If that isn't smoke," I wanted to know, "what is it?"

"I think it's water vapor, Rider, arising probably from a hot spring."

"Hot spring, my ear! Look at that bluish tinge."

"It does seem to have a bluish tinge, all right," observed St. Cloud, handing the glasses to me; "but, you know, that may be due to the haze."

"Doubting Tom," said I, "meet Doubting Thomas."

I brought the glasses to a focus and for some time studied the phenomenon closely.

"You were right," I observed, returning the binoculars to Henry: "they don't solve the problem."

"So you think there are human beings over there behind that wall of trees?" he queried, examining a spot about four miles distant with the glasses.

"I think the vapor indicates that, for I don't believe that it is the vapor of water. But an answer to the question easily can be had."

"Yes," he nodded. "And in the morning we'll get it."

"Maybe we will," put in Morgan.

"I thought I saw something move down on that point," Henry added, pointing with his finger; "but I couldn't tell for sure because of the fading light."

We soon returned to the fire. When we finished the first meal eaten by terrestrial men on the Planet of Love, darkness was falling. The sky, though dotted with fleecy clouds, was clear, and the brighter stars already were twinkling down at us.

For a time St. Cloud and I carried on a rambling conversation, but Henry Quainfan was silent. He sat with his back against a small tree and, with his head slightly bowed, gazed across the water into the blackness whence had come that awful scream.

St. Cloud and I talked on, but Henry said never a word. I do not believe he heard us. And at last, we too, were silent, and then could be heard only the lazy crackling of the fire, which cast a lurid light for a little distance out upon the glassy water.

I wondered if Henry was thinking of that awful scream, which, now when I thought of it, rang again in my ears. It was unlikely, I thought, that his mind was dwelling on that. It was the death cry of some animal, that was all, and now it was all over; never again would that unknown thing know joy or sorrow, fear or the throes of death. It was gone, was in the nothing into which the beasts go, into which all sentient things go save men and women and the men-children and women-children of men and women. It was gone and would be no more forever. And into that terrible blackness (awful thought) Henry Quainfan believed that he would be lowered by the hands of Death.

Ere long, however, Henry came out of that fit of abstraction, to devote his attention to the stars.

"What do you make of it?" St. Cloud asked him after a time.

"Wait a while," Henry returned.

And it was a while, during which he continued his watch of the heavens.

"Well, what do you know about that!" he sang out at last.

"What?" St. Cloud asked, rising and directing his steps toward Henry Quainfan.

I followed.

"What star is that?" Henry said, indicating a blazing diamond in the northern heavens and halfway up to the zenith, in which direction auroral beams were shooting up—giving one the idea of swords in the hands of hidden cosmic giants—quivered and vanished.

"Alpha of the Lyre," returned St. Cloud.

"Our pole star," Henry told him: "the apex of the sun's way."

"What a coincidence!" murmured St. Cloud.

"Co—what?"

"Incidence."

"How so, Morgan?"

"Why, she was the earth's pole star once and will be again, in the distant future—eleven thousand years, isn't it?"

"It seems," I observed, "that Terra and Venus are indeed twin sisters. How strange that their axis should be tilted at the same angle!"

"Approximately," said Henry. "In point of fact, though, Rider, nothing is strange. But see here—here's the whole business in a nutshell:

"There's the pole of the ecliptic, between those faint stars, Delta and Zeta Draconis astronomers call them—though this constellation is no longer a dragon but only a serpent, for (cruel ginks!) they lopped off its wings to make the asterism called the Little Bear. But that isn't the Venusian ecliptic pole; owing to the inclination of the planet's orbit, it lies off here the distance of six lunar diameters. That spot there would be our pole if the axis of Venus was perpendicular to the orbital plane."

"But it isn't," was my sage observation.

"It isn't," said Henry Quainfan, "though how far Vega may be from the pole itself remains to be determined, for the chances are that (like Polaris) it does not mark the precise spot where there is no diurnal motion.

"The height of the pole," he added, "gives the latitude directly (there is no longitude) and the season can be—"

"Look!" cried St. Cloud.

There in the east, above one of the peaks of that awful cordillera, were the earth and the moon—the former shining with a splendor that was truly wonderful, her bluish light, however, less pronounced here in the deeps of this aerial ocean.

In silence, and with indescribable feelings, we three stood gazing. One was silent and dead, a floating cinder, the other teeming with life and the sound and stirring of life; but none of those sounds that we knew so well came to our ears, and naught could we see but starshine, for the earth was as any of the stars that swing in the unutterable immensity of God's ether sea—a thing unutterably infinitesimal.

Then came (and with a rush) a sight so strangely, weirdly beautiful that it beggars description. No pen could convey an adequate picture of what we saw—the Venusian aurora in all its terrific intensity and awesome beauty.

But at last we tore ourselves away from the sight and entered the *Hornet*.

Henry was asleep almost instantly. How I envied him that faculty of dropping off, apparently under any circumstances, almost the moment his head touched the pillow!

St. Cloud and I exchanged a number of speculations, some of them curious and wild enough, and then of a sudden he fell silent.

For some time I lay watching the flaming of the aurora overhead, wondering about the morrow and about things which the mind never should conjure up; wondering and wondering—and wondering on in my dreams.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DESTROYED

WHEN I awoke, the sunlight, pale and yellowish, was slanting in through the windows. St. Cloud was still sleeping, but Henry was gone.

I rose, went to the manhole and stuck my head out; a fire was going, and seated by it, his rifle beside him, was Henry Quainfan—shaving.

The sun had just shoved his great disk above the cordillera, which loomed up dim and evanescent as a Turnerian vision in that curious haze of morning.

The air was cool and sweet. A great silence pressed down on the place, disturbed only by the crackling of the fire, and the flag hung motionless against its staff.

"Hello, Beau Brummel!" I sang out—and heard St. Cloud stir and mutter behind me.

"Morning, Rider," returned Henry. "How did you sleep?"

"Fine, only I had some queer dreams."

"Your imagination," Henry explained. "You let it have free rein."

"No dream, I'll wager, like mine!" muttered St. Cloud.

I turned, to see him sitting up with an expression on his dark features that often comes to me now—though at the time I thought but little of it, save that his dream must have been one truly terrible.

"About this world?" I queried.

"And another, Rider. But—"

He made a wild gesture and stared at me with a strange look in his eyes.

"I wish I couldn't think about it," he said; "to talk about it—that's out of the question."

I think I know now what St. Cloud dreamed, and so perhaps will you ere I am done.

I went out, soon followed by Morgan.

"Great explorers you two!" observed Henry Quainfan. "Slumbering the morning away as though you were at home, instead of on an alien planet with Heaven only knows what things at hand awaiting discovery!"

Rather to my surprise, St. Cloud remained silent, staring moodily about him.

"As for you," I observed to Henry, "you seem to anticipate a meeting with Aphrodite herself."

He stroked his chin with placid satisfaction.

"Better follow suit, Rider, you look like the devil."

"Thanks—but I'll wait till we meet the lady."

"Then you're in for a beard to your feet."

"Indeed!" I said. "But—is that smoke still rising?"

"I don't know, Rider; never looked."

"Great explorer you are!" I told him. "A Venusian could be creeping up behind each tree, and you be none the wiser."

"We'll soon solve the mystery," he returned. "For as soon as we have had breakfast—"

"Breakfast!" interrupted St. Cloud, giving the place a periscopic examination. "A man could break his neck here sooner than his fast."

"Hope," said Henry Quainfan, "makes a good breakfast."

"But, oh," Morgan told him, "what a supper!"

"Where nothing is," I observed, "a little would ease."

"Every time the sheep bleateth, Rider," Henry said, "he loseth a mouthful."

"Which, translated, means that we must get our own breakfast. And after breakfast? You started to tell us that."

"After breakfast, we'll build a raft."

"A what?" I exclaimed.

"A raft. A canoe's grandfather. A thing that floats and on which you can go gliding over the bounding billows."

"Great Jupiter Ammon!" said Morgan. "Are we going to explore this place on a—darn it, on a catamaran?"

"That's the idea," Henry nodded.

"Why not in the *Hornet*?"

"We've been corked up in that steel bottle for two weeks; here we are in this Cytherean beauty and mystery—and you want to be a pickled explorer, as it were! Come, Morgan; if we are going to see this world, we want to live in it, walk about in it, fight in it if it need be—not merely peek at it from the oculi of the *Hornet*. And not only that, but the outing is just the thing we need."

"Outing!" echoed Morgan. "Good heavens!"

"Of course, we'll have to be careful," said Henry; "for who knows what terrible denizens may be prowling about in this wilderness?"

He turned his look to me.

"What do you thing of it, Rider?"

"I think it capital," I told him. "You are right: those steel walls are very fine, but we didn't come here to remain like so many bees in a bottle."

"Sail on, Palinurus," Morgan said to Henry; "but I tell you this: I don't like the voyage before us."

Then, as though addressing himself to some figure standing there behind Henry Quainfan:

"Welcome, Mischief, if thou comest alone!"

Accordingly, as soon as breakfast was done, we set to work on the raft, using the boles of small trees. It was soon made, was about twenty feet long by four in width and pointed at each end.

Little did we dream, as we looked upon our completed craft, how long that journey we were destined to make upon it.

We immediately got ready to embark.

And now comes a curious thing. Morgan St. Cloud I may call the Cautious, Henry Quainfan the Nonchalant. And yet when it came to this excursion, which would take us to we knew not what, it was Henry Quainfan who armed himself to the teeth, while St. Cloud regarded his Winchester, cartridge-belt and hunting knife as sufficient for any emergency likely to confront us. At Henry's importunity, however, he added a revolver—in a holster attached to a belt beaded with cartridges.

Indeed, for my part, I thought such an armament (including the revolver, that is) sufficient, and took virtually the same as St. Cloud. But how was I to know? Heaven only knows how many times I have wished that Morgan and myself had loaded ourselves down like Henry Quainfan.

He *was* armed. To begin with, there was, of course, his Winchester; at each hip, pendent from a loaded cartridge-belt, was a .44 Colt's revolver; over his left shoulder, and passing under his right arm, were two belts filled with rifle cartridges; and at his right hip, in a sheath, almost hidden by the holster there, was a big hunting-knife—to say nothing of the cartridges he had stuffed into his pockets.

"Great Jupiter!" exclaimed St. Cloud. "Do you intend to kill all the Venusians on the globe?"

"It looks like it, all right!" I laughed.

"He who laughs last laughs best," said Henry Quainfan, "though here's truly hoping that I won't have any occasion to indulge in cachination."

"Cachination is right," St. Cloud observed, "for in that case, there'll be no mirth in your laugh."

Everything was soon ready, and we pushed off—with the flag at the masthead. We had provided ourselves with long poles and with paddles. Of course, the raft would be an awkward thing to paddle, but by going straight across we would save six or eight miles that appeared uninteresting—if such a word can be used in speaking of anything in this place.

It was with keen anticipation on my part that we started on this voyage of ours—longer than any of us dreamed. We poled around the nearer end of the island, the one where Henry had swept the lake and the shores with his glasses, and headed across.

That mysterious vapor, I have forgotten to say, was still rising.

As we were going round that point, I turned and looked back at the *Hornet*, obeying an impulse that I can almost believe was prescient. Something else claimed the attention of Morgan and Henry, and so mine were the eyes to see the *Hornet* for the last time.

St. Cloud soon produced a fishing line and a fly-hook, which he had chanced upon that morning in one of his pockets—St. Cloud was nothing if not a disciple of old Izaak Walton—attached the line to

his pole, which made a ludicrous rod, and cast.

Henry and I had ceased to paddle and were watching expectantly. Hardly had the treacherous fly struck the water when there came a streak of silver out of the greenish depths. There was a splash, and the fish came inboard, wiggling violently.

"Aha!" exclaimed Morgan, "what do you think of that?"

He held the fish up for us to see.

"Gentlemen," he said, *"Mr. Salmo Purpuratus!"*

"Cutthroat!" I exclaimed.

Henry Quainfan took off his hat and ran his fingers through his curls.

"What the deuce," said he, "is that fellow doing here?"

"It is quite a coincidence, all right," remarked Morgan. "I've caught hundreds of trout just like him on the earth."

"It does make a fellow's Darwinism feel a little groggy," Henry admitted.

We reached the shore (it was very warm now) and poled along toward that point behind which the vapor was rising into the still air.

"By Jo!" exclaimed St. Cloud. "Look there! It is smoke!"

"It is," Henry Quainfan nodded, "and aqueous vapor, too. See, the smoke is a little to one side now; from the island, the two were in the line of sight."

"And that means intelligent life," I said.

"It looks like it," returned Henry earnestly. "We'll soon see."

St. Cloud ran his eye, with apparent apprehension, along the margin of the forest.

"Maybe," he said, "we are *seen*."

We proceeded with senses on the qui vive, expectancy it seemed in the very air about us. Minute succeeded minute, however, and nothing happened. We reached the point, doubled it, and there at last our objective was before our eyes.

"We were both correct, Rider," Henry observed, speaking in guarded tones: "there is my thermal spring, all right, and there your fire—or rather, smoke, for I do not see any flame."

"Nor," said Morgan, "do I see any signs of *men*. How on earth, now, do you explain that fire?"

"I can't," Henry returned. "Wait till we get there and see."

Slowly, with sight and hearing at the quintessence of keenness, we drew nearer to the shore. At last the raft grounded; after a few moments of scrutiny, Henry stepped off.

"Nobody at home!" he observed.

St. Cloud and I followed at his heels.

Of a sudden Henry gave a sharp exclamation.

"There you are!" he said, pointing with his rifle. "That explains it!"

And it did. There, fifteen feet or so before us, were the charred sticks and dead ashes of a camp-fire!

"Great heavens!" said St. Cloud, glancing (a little nervously, I thought) into the gloom of the trees. "Men!"

"Men have been here," nodded Henry Quainfan. "But that doesn't mean *human* men."

We moved forward slowly, with feelings that I shall not attempt to describe.

"The flames," observed St. Cloud, "traveled from the abandoned fire over into that log, which has been smoldering away ever since."

"Just so," nodded Henry. "But—let's be careful now; what we want to find is footprints."

"I have my doubts," I remarked. "Evidently some days have elapsed since those Venusians kindled their fire in this spot."

"And it has rained since," said Henry.

"How," I asked, "do you know that?"

"It is plain; look at the ashes."

"And look at those charred bones," said Morgan. "Alas, people have to eat even on Venus!"

"I suppose we'll have to page Robinson Crusoe," mused Henry Quainfan at last; "I don't see the ghost of a footprint."

"Here's hoping," I said, "that we don't have to wait so long as Crusoe did."

"Don't worry," St. Cloud told me; "you won't."

But not a footprint, nor anything like one, could we find in that spot, though we scrutinized every inch of ground.

"Well," Henry said, "here is another proof that Venus is the abode of intelligent creatures. However, they seem to have deserted these solitudes, but surely they can not have gone far."

"Maybe," came the typical St. Cloudian observation, "before this business is done, we'll wish that they had gone farther."

"If the devil was a hog," said Henry Quainfan, "everybody would have plenty of bacon."

This first day of ours on the planet Venus, it is quite needless to say, was full of interest and wonder, but I can not pen that interest and wonder—must leave it to the reader's imagination.

We encountered no danger, discovered no further sign of intelligent life.

When the shades of evening were falling, we were about ten miles from the *Hornet*, and we then ran the raft ashore, lighted a fire, pitched the tent and took our evening's repast.

We had seen several streams entering the lake, but had found no outlet.

The night passed uneventfully. We kept the fire burning brightly, and each took a turn at watching, while the others slept.

During my watch, about midnight, there came through the still air a sudden and distant screaming—a terrible sound; but it soon ceased, without awakening my companions. Save for a pair of green eyes that peered at me now and again in the blackness of the trees, that was all.

I have forgotten to mention the length of the Venusian day. The Venusian day is almost the same as the terrestrial one. There is a difference of but eight minutes, the day here being eight minutes shorter than the day on Terra. The Venusian mean solar day is twenty-three hours and fifty-two minutes, as against the terrestrial mean solar day of twenty-four hours. Venus turns on her axis nearly two hundred and twenty-seven times during her journey round the sun, and so her year (since one rotation, so far as day and night are concerned, is lost) contains very nearly two hundred and twenty-six days—two hundred and twenty-five days, twenty-two hours, forty-nine minutes and (I believe) seven seconds.

On the succeeding day, about noon, we discovered the outlet—about fifty feet wide, swift and deep.

And as darkness was coming down on the lonely place, came the thing that destroyed.

We were returning to the island—Farnermain Island, by the way, it had been named by Henry and St. Cloud. We were but a half mile or so distant. St. Cloud saw it first—above the trees, high in the sky behind us, a fiery thing that shot through the atmosphere with a hissing sound, leaving behind it a greenish train, which lingered for hours, swaying about in the air-currents like some monstrous serpent.

But right over our heads it came and down to earth, burying itself in Farnermain Island and utterly destroying the *Hornet*. Not a vestige remained of the thing in which we had made our long journey through space to the Planet of Love, to this wild Venusian solitude, upon which the eyes of terrestrial men had never lighted before ours had.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

WHAT?

"GONE!" said Henry Quainfan. "It's good-bye to the earth now!"

The huge meteorite had ignited some bushes and trees, and by the light of the fire, which was spreading rapidly, we saw at a glance that Henry's words were only too true.

There we stood on the raft, a hundred yards or so away, and just looked. I remember that an aquatic bird sent its raucous cry across the water and that once, from the deeps of the forest behind us, came a great savage roar.

"Yes!" burst out St. Cloud, "and a beautiful fix we are in now, I must say! It's Venus for the rest of our days—though the chances are those days will not be many. That's what we've got for going exploring on an infernal antediluvian catamaran! If we had gone in the Hornet, as we should have done—"

"If's are very fine things, Morgan," Henry interrupted, "but they don't help the toothache."

I saw St. Cloud's dark eyes flash in the dusky light and thought an outburst imminent; but a swift change passed over the man.

"Forgive me, old top," he said. "But, you know, this thing hit me hard."

"If we had been there in the *Hornet*," was my sage remark, "it would have hit us harder."

"What chance of chances!" murmured Henry Quainfan. "That of all spots!"

"Probably it wasn't chance after all," Morgan said.

Henry turned and looked at him.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean," returned St. Cloud boldly, "that I see in this the hand of God raised in warning against man's proud presumption!"

Henry Quainfan gave him a look of sheer amazement.

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"We have broken one of the Creator's laws, so to say, and—"

"Say how!" Henry Quainfan broke in sharply.

"The Almighty never intended (to use such an expression for want of a better one) that man should leave the earth and go to another world."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Henry. "Your fancy, Morgan, is riding a merry-go-round."

And I confess that I thought something like that myself. That St. Cloud, in spite of his strong scientific beliefs, was a good bit of a mystic, I well knew; but I had never expected to find him entertaining a belief so bizarre as this.

Sometimes, though, I find myself wondering if it was so bizarre after all.

And as for mysticism and science, who can draw the boundary between them? Indeed, is there a boundary at all to draw? Are they not, in truth, one and the same thing—known to men by different names simply because those seeking the key which will unlock the Mystery-of-It-All do not follow one clue? Though a man travels toward the east, he will come to the west.

Henry Quainfan dipped his paddle.

"Let's land and—look," he said.

"I don't think we'll do much looking," I observed; "for see how that fire is spreading. Did you notice how dry things were in those trees? The whole island will soon be a furnace."

"At any rate," Henry returned, "we can go in close."

We started.

"It strikes me as curious," he added, "that there is no steam: that thing landed close to the water's edge."

"But," I remarked, "look how it flung the gravel up, in all directions; that keeps the water out."

"Does it?" exclaimed St. Cloud. "Look at that!"

I was already looking. Steam had broken out as though from a burst boiler pipe. And the next instant came a terrific explosion. A great cloud of steam shot into the air, and stones came plunking into the water thick as hail, some of them passing within dangerous proximity.

"Excuse me!" I said, beginning to wield my paddle with great diligence—though in the opposite direction. "I'd rather look from a distance."

"Ditto," said St. Cloud, following my example.

"That's probably the only blow-out," protested Henry Quainfan.

But we kept on going.

"You can examine this miniature Vesuvius," I told him, "in the morning."

"I guess you're right," he said, dipping his own blade.

The fire, which, as I have said, was spreading rapidly, was flooding the water (rippling merrily) with a ghostly day. The light played upon the tree trunks along that shore which we were approaching, struggled into the dense forest and became lost in the darkness.

A steady wind was blowing, carrying the sparks lakeward and thus saving the forest from the conflagration.

The bow of the raft grounded on the pebbly shore, and Henry and I stepped off. St. Cloud did not follow. There he sat on the *Nancy Lee* (for so Henry had christened our catamaran) staring across at the fiery grave of the *Hornet* with an air of utter and gloomy abstraction.

"Well," said Henry after a time, "I see no reason why we should starve to death just because the *Hornet* has been destroyed. I move that we get something to eat."

"Yes," I nodded.

I must confess, however, that I was not the possessor of a hearty appetite just then—though I had been a short time before.

"Morgan takes it hard," observed Henry as we were breaking the firewood. "You can't blame him any, though. And yet—maybe all this is a fortunate misfortune, so to speak."

I made an interrogative noise.

"Just so, Rider," he went on. "Why, now, should we weep and gnash our teeth when, for all we know to the contrary, this catastrophe which has befallen us may be the precursor of some wondrous fortune? Probably on a day Morgan will render up thanks to the Omnipotence for the destruction of the *Hornet*."

"But—" I began.

"But what?" he queried, smiling.

"It is so frightfully unlikely."

"What, Rider?" he laughed. "Unlikely? And you believe in anthrapocentricism!"

"What on earth has anthropocentricism got to do with it?"

"Everything. For look you! You believe that man is the greatest thing in all Creation, that all things were made for man, that there are men and women on this world that Tellurians call Venus. Unlikely, when you believe that? Why, Rider, perhaps you and Morgan will marry queens!"

And he grinned.

"Couldn't we have gone to them in the *Hornet*?"

"Not these ladies I have in mind, Rider."

My belief that there is nothing in the Universe greater than man, that a grand and beautiful world would be a useless thing unless peopled with men and women (or in some way subservient to

the existence of human creatures on other orbs) was the source of much amusement to Henry Quainfan—was Ptolemaic, antediluvian.

"Of course I belive that," I told him, "leaving out those queens, that is. It seems plain to me that the earth was prepared, and in all likelihood created, for this very purpose—to be an abode for man. One has but to look about him to see proofs of that express purpose. They are everywhere, anybody can see them—'proofs of special forethought and adaptation,' as, I remember, it is put in the only text-book on astronomy into which I ever poked my nose. And here are the very words with which the writer clinches the matter:

"'Coal and oil in the earth for fuel and light, forests for timber, metals in the mountains for machinery, rivers for navigation, and level plains for corn.'"

"As for the rivers, Rider," queried Henry, "how did he explain rapids and quicksands? It seems he forgot a few things, as those who think they have discovered the creative purposes so often do. The poppy, for instance? Created that man might have opium? He might have told us, too, about cobras, earthquakes, tornadoes, sunken rocks (for navigation) tigers, typhoons and rattlesnakes. Why do we find these things? To enable man to remember at times the uncertainty of life—that the sunlight in which he has his laughter is shadowed by the wings of Death? And as for those metals in the mountains? Might they not have been put there so man—this being with the godlike intellect—could make himself a corkscrew?"

"Hopeless!" I exclaimed. "Utterly hopeless! When you look at a rose, do you see nothing but thorns?"

"When I look at a prickly-pear, I don't see a cucumber."

"You don't see a pear, either."

"He's blind enough, Rider, who can't see the holes in a sieve."

"To change the subject," I said. "What are we going to do now? Go down that river?"

"Of course. What else can we do?"

"Heavens," I queried, "when our ammunition is gone?"

"We'll be Pithecanthropi then, Rider—unless these Venusians take a hand in the matter."

"I fancy that's just what they are going to do."

"Of course," he nodded. "It's only a question of time."

Not long afterwards, I heard him singing away to himself in a very low voice, once the following lines from Kipling's *To the True Romance*:

"As thou didst teach all lovers speech,
And Life all mystery,
So shalt Thou rule by every school
Till love and longing die,
Who wast or yet the lights were set,
A whisper in the Void,
Who shalt be sung through planets young
When this is clean destroyed."

I slept but little that night, but enough to have many horrible dreams.

In the morning, first thing, we went across to smoldering Farnermain Island to see the grave of the *Hornet*. All to be seen, however, was the huge meteorite (the dull radiation of which was still sufficient to keep us at a little distance) and the upflung earth and gravel: not a vestige of the *Hornet* was anywhere to be found.

Breakfast eaten, preparations were begun immediately for our journey down the river. We gathered a goodly supply of vegetables something like the carrot and the turnip, and I was fortunate enough to get another deer.

At last we stepped aboard the *Nancy Lee* and shoved off.

We went across to the island again, but this time we did not go ashore—stood there for some minutes in silence, just looking.

Then Henry Quainfan dipped his pole and started the raft, St. Cloud and I followed suit, and thus began our long journey into the Unknown.

We swung the raft back to the shore and skirted it, arriving at the river in about two hours' time.

"And now—what?" said St. Cloud as its densely-wooded banks began to slip past us.

Henry smiled his slow smile but said nothing.

"Yes," I said, "—*what?*"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE THING IN THE NIGHT

ALL we had to do was steer the *Nancy Lee*. Our progress we estimated at two miles an hour. Though in the shade nearly all the time, we found it very warm. And the heat and light would have been powerful indeed if it had not been for that curious flocculence drawn over the sky like a curtain.

I have yet, by the way, to see the Venusian firmament cloudless from horizon to horizon. You must not get the idea, though, that this is a gloomy place—in any way analogous to the earth (as pictured) in Carboniferous times. Quite the contrary, this world of Venus. For despite the ever-present clouds, it is a world of intense light, brilliant foliage, of colors wonderful beyond all description.

At times came the songs of birds and the drone of insects. The water whispered dreamily. Occasionally came the splash of a leaping fish. But all these sounds seemed but the voice, as it were, of the great silence which reigned over this vast wilderness through which we were floating.

Dense and dark that forest rose up (with here and there a dash of brilliant color) and sometimes I wondered if some savage commorant of those gloomy depths had greedy eyes fixed upon us.

At length we went ashore to cook our noonday meal. As we were shoving the raft out into the stream, a great roar swept through the forest.

"Lion?" queried St. Cloud.

We listened intently for a space, but the sound did not come again.

On and on we floated, hour after hour; and when twilight came creeping over the world, the topography of the valley had not changed at all.

We selected an open spot wherein to pass the night and ran the *Nancy Lee* ashore.

Henry stepped off first, Winchester in hand. I saw him go up the bank, stand and peer about him into that thickening gloom.

I had stepped ashore and was drawing the raft up farther when a sharp exclamation burst from the lips of St. Cloud, who, standing at the stern of the raft, was staring over my head with horror-wide eyes.

I straightened up, swinging round as I did so, to see a great tawny thing spring into the air straight toward Henry Quainfan.

I cried out in horror and closed my eyes. A shot rang out. I looked and saw that terrible beast turn a complete somersault and strike the ground. Henry had not had time to throw the rifle to his shoulder; he had fired from the hip. Came a horrible, indescribable noise from the animal, which was thrashing wildly about. Another shot rang out, and that thrashing ceased suddenly.

Grabbing my rifle, I rushed up the bank, followed by Morgan. There, in the death quiver, lay a lion—just like the caged lions we so often had seen on the earth, save for its mane, larger than the mane of any terrestrial lion I ever heard of.

"A close call, Henry!" St. Cloud cried excitedly. "I thought you were a goner that time."

Henry Quainfan smiled—as though he had killed a lion every morning before breakfast.

"Lucky my back wasn't turned," he said. "And has it occurred to you that this fellow may have a mate close at hand?"

I jumped, and St. Cloud flung forth a startled oath. We had not thought of that. But the lion had been alone, or, if he had one, his companion did not put in an appearance.

When the excitement produced by this sudden and almost fatal incident had somewhat subsided, St. Cloud and I fell to making a fire, though not without casting many a glance at the deepening gloom that was drawing a thick veil over the deeps of the slumbering forest.

The fire was soon blazing brightly, enhancing the encircling gloom.

It was quite dark when we sat down to eat; and this night we ate what remained of the food we had brought from the *Hornet*, the last of our terrestrial food, some beef. And very good it tasted, too.

It was obvious that that lion was something of a mystery to Henry Quainfan. Here was presented another of those very remarkable "coincidences." His belief in Darwinism, I thought, was surely shattered now. He did not acquaint us with his thoughts, however, but sat brooding in silence (his eyes now and again resting on the body of the lion) and for my part, I never even mentioned evolution.

The night passed uneventfully. During my watch, I heard no sounds, save the low, melancholy whisperings of the river.

At dawn we shoved the *Nancy Lee* out into the stream and floated on.

The river soon became sluggish, and so we plied our paddles; the depth of the stream made poling impossible.

That day passed uneventfully. Likewise did the night. And on the succeeding day, about three hours after sunrise, we entered the great swamp.

And that swamp! A muddy, slimy, dismal wilderness, a gloomy place of reeds, of rotting vegetation, filamentiferous trees, strange water birds and great alligator-like reptiles.

On and on, hour after hour, we paddled down the sluggish stream, which often split into many streams; and when twilight was deepening to darkness, still on every hand stretched the swamp, miasmal and dismal.

We ran the raft up to a big moss-festooned tree, lighted a fire on its great roots and, standing on the raft, cooked our venison. When we had eaten, we made on the raft a hearth of water-soaked roots, upon which we lighted a little fire. Having secured a goodly supply of chips, we shoved the *Nancy Lee* out into the slough and moored it there by putting a couple of the poles between the logs and sinking them deep into the mud.

We felt safer out there.

Suddenly there came from out the darkness a blood-curdling wail. Icy shivers ran up and down my spine. It was not strong, was a throbbing wail—with a plaintive note that was simply awful. A strange thing was that we could form no opinion as to its distance, nor could we even tell precisely the direction whence it came through the darkness.

For five minutes or so it rose and fell, and then we heard it no more. I have never heard anything like it in all my life; I have never heard anything so ghostly, so burdened with—oh, I do not know what.

Lost souls must wail like that.

"It sounds," said Henry, "like the wail of a thing that is dead and that wails because it is dead and can not die."

That was a miserable night. We lay with the rope passed over our bodies in order that we might not roll off the raft in our sleep. I was afraid of those alligator-things, though Henry (for what reason I could not imagine) said he thought that there was nothing to fear from them. And in dreams I fled wildly through that soggy wilderness, sinking into the mud and slime up to my knees, and floundering and screaming, with a half dozen or so of the hideous saurians in swift pursuit.

Of course, each of us took a turn at watching. Several times, during my vigil, there was a stirring (which I connected with the alligators) in the water near us. Once, for a little space, a pair of red eyes gleamed in that inky blackness beyond the ring of feeble light cast by our fire; and once, too, from a distance, there came a great splashing.

At last the blessed light came creeping through that awful place, and directly we resumed our paddling.

Hour after hour passed, the sun reached its zenith, and still there was no change.

Sometimes snakes swam across the water, swiftly and silently, and long-legged water birds hied themselves to concealment as we approached. Now an alligator went into the water with a loud splash, now as silently as a shadow. Here and there flowed streams of sunshine; now and again insects came and passed. Though it was ever changing, ever slipping past, still the view was always the same.

And when the sun went down, there was no change.

Another miserable night came and went. Mile on mile we paddled, hour after hour, and still that dismal, terrible view. I saw pictures of ourselves toiling on and on, day after day, ever growing weaker and weaker, ever paddling in an endless, steaming swamp, until at last. . .

At often as I flung them away, the horrible pictures of our end would come floating back across a background of hateful and gloomy forest.

But the swamp was not interminable: this day we issued from its sickly deeps.

As the sun was setting, suddenly we came to a great hill, through which a remarkable canon had been cut by the emerging river; and a shout went up as the welcome and lovely sight met our eyes.

We landed just below the canon, where was discovered the spoor of deer; and the next morning, an hour or two after sunrise, we proceeded on our voyage, a goodly supply of vegetables, berries and venison aboard the *Nancy Lee*.

A stubby beard clothed St. Cloud's face and mine, but the face of Henry Quainfan was as smooth as A. Belvedere's. He had, since the landing—yes, even in that infernal swamp—shaved every day.

We had proceeded five or six miles, and St. Cloud and I were engaged in languid conversation, when an exclamation suddenly burst from the lips of Henry, who was at the bow.

Instinctively St. Cloud and I made a movement toward our rifles.

"Look!" Henry cried, pointing ahead. "Look at that!"

We were rounding a sharp bend, and before us, about two hundred yards away, was the ruin of a bridge which in some far time had arched the stream.

"Another proof of intelligent life," said Henry. "But it appears that this place is not the abode of intelligent beings now. However, such creatures must be somewhere near, and we have but to go till we find them."

"Or till they find us," said Morgan. "And maybe, for all we know, some of them have got guns."

"Well," Henry smiled back at him, "haven't we?"

We landed just above the ruin. On the opposite side of the river, all trace of the bridge had been swept away.

But one arch remained, which was of the kind called extradosed, its span about thirty feet. The archstones, massive blocks of sandstone, were beautifully

carved—even the intrados. One of the springers was half covered, the other completely so, with earth, for the river—which, by the way, we had named the Quainfan, that is, St. Cloud and I—had not only deserted its old channel but had filled it up.

We passed through the arch, proceeded up the bank and out upon this relic of a departed civilization.

The ruins of the departed are always invested with a peculiar air of deep sadness and mockery. A sense of loneliness and ineffable insignificance takes possession of one as he gazes upon them, and it strikes him as a mockery that works of men endure and frown on and on, from age to age, through sunshine, and destructive inclemencies of the weather and the vicissitudes of centuries, when the noble beings that builded them are as the dust that is blown hither and yon by the desert wind.

At least so it has always been to me, and so it was as I stood there on that relic of an unknown people, wondering what joy and sorrow had passed over those stones on which we alien creatures now stood, what laughter and tears, what love and hate, hope and fear and blasted hope.

At last Henry wandered off into the forest, leaving St. Cloud and me musing there on the ruin.

"Hey!" his voice came suddenly. "Come and see this!"

"What now, I wonder!" exclaimed Morgan as we turned to answer the call.

"We'll soon see."

We pushed on rapidly through the dense undergrowth, broke through a thorny tangle and stood beside Henry Quainfan.

"What do you think of that?" he said, waving his hand. "There is another sad memento of a vanished people."

"Human people?" I couldn't help querying.

"I fancy," he returned, "that we'll soon have the answer to that question."

We stood before a frowning, creeper-veiled stone structure, which had well withstood the ravages of time. It was of but a single story, was richly carved and possessed features which reminded us most forcibly of the Egyptian style of architecture. There was the same solidity, the same flat roof, the same converging of the exterior surfaces of the walls. The resemblance, to say the least, was a very striking one.

The building, we found, was about forty feet wide and about twice that in length.

We hoped to find among the numerous sculptures the likeness of the beings that had builded this solitary edifice, but in this we met with disappointment.

And, as I stood there in that gloomy building, I wondered how many hundreds of years had rolled across the globe since those massive blocks of stone were put in place, with what revels, and agony perhaps, those massive walls had rung, what manner of beings had reared them up, and why those ancient denizens had departed this place, now the home of wild beasts and silence.

About a hundred yards from this building, we discovered a shaft of stone some eighty feet in height. There were some curious hieroglyphics sculptured on this huge monolith, but, of course, we could make nothing of these. None of the many characters represented was human.

And, though we searched that forest roundabout for hours, we found nothing more. This was something of a surprise to us, for why should only this one building have been erected here?

When the shades of evening were coming down, we repaird to the raft, pitched the tent on the bank by the bridge, lighted a fire and took our saltless, unsavory repast.

When awakened that night by Henry to take my turn at guarding, I thought there was something out of the ordinary in his manner; as I issued from the tent, his words told me this had been no mere fancy on my part.

"You're apt to find your watch enlivened, Rider."

"By what?" I asked quickly.

"I wish I knew. There's something down there."

And he pointed with his rifle into the darkness.

"I saw it," he added, "just as it was gliding into the bushes."

"When was this, and what was it?"

"About five minutes ago. I have been straining my eyes and ears ever since, but I haven't seen or heard a thing. As for what I saw—listen!"

The sharp snapping of a twig, which was succeeded by the faint rustling of leaves, came to our ears.

A few moments of breathless expectation followed, but not the faintest sound came to our strained organs of hearing.

"I suppose it's an animal," I said. "and doubtless it will not approach because of the fire."

Henry, who had placed himself before the fire, so that he might see the better, and who now stood staring into the darkness with a look of absent-mindedness on his face, vouchsafed no reply.

A minute or so passed, and, at the expiration of that period, he turned suddenly and spoke.

"Of course," he said, "it was in almost total darkness, and I didn't see it till it was entering the bushes; all the same I think I saw a biped."

"Biped?"

"Just so. Furthermore, I think this biped was—"

He looked at me with a curious expression in his eyes.

"Well?" I queried.

"You must remember that I got but a glimpse of it, and that—"

And again he looked at me.

"Go on," I said, not a little puzzled.

He peered again at the spot where the thing had disappeared and stood musing awhile in silence.

"Rider," he said suddenly, "remember what I said concerning the imperfect—"

"I remember that," I interrupted him. "What on earth do you think you saw?"

"I believe," he made answer, "that I saw—a man!"

"What?" I exclaimed. "A human?"

"Just so. A man—or a quasi-human animal. But remember—"

He was interrupted by a loud splash, coming from downstream. We peered into the darkness, listening intently.

"It sounded like—" I began, to be interrupted by another splash, more distant, it seemed, than the first.

"Hush!" Henry whispered. "There! Look!"

Suddenly he gripped my arm.

"See!" he exclaimed. "See that!"

At the edge of that faint stream of starshine which flowed along the center of the river, was a moving black thing, a thing that glided swiftly down the stream. It had no distinct outline, was simply a piece of moving blackness, and, almost that instant my eyes lighted upon it, it vanished into darkness.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE FOOTPRINT

"PROBABLY a canoe." I said, peering down the river, the either margin of which was in blackness cast by the wall of trees.

Henry dropped the butt of his rifle to the earth and stood musing awhile in silence—his senses, however, on the alert for any lurking danger.

"I suppose so," he nodded. "The infernal thing was visible but for a moment; I couldn't make out any shape, to say nothing of the being, or beings, that propelled it. Could you?"

I shook my head.

"Couldn't see anything but a piece of blackness that moved."

"All I could make out, too," said Henry. "But I believe 'twas a man I saw."

"We'll soon know," I said, "for undoubtedly, before long, we shall have a host of them upon us."

"Oh, we'll learn soon, all right.

"I didn't expect," he went on, "to see a single living thing on this planet at all like any terrestrial creature; and it is unnecessary to dwell upon the egregious coincidences that we have seen."

'Coincidences, my eye!"

"All my evolutionary beliefs are shattered, Rider. I don't know what to think now. I am prepared for anything. I am beyond surprise. It would not astonish me at all to see, at any moment, a man stalk into the firelight and say in English, or any other terrestrial tongue:

" 'How do you do! Welcome, strangers. Welcome. Whence come you?' "

"If we were only sure of that welcome part of the business," I remarked, "it would be very fine."

"You're catching it from Morgan," he smiled.

"Confound it," I said, "this is enough to make a fellow imagine things—all manner of things."

"I can't understand it, Rider," he told me. "It is a mystery—everything. I can't believe in Darwinism now; and how in the world can I believe in the other?"

"How," I demanded, "can you not believe in the other?"

"But you don't understand it, Rider. How can I believe that the species were created separately, were brought into existence by a direct fiat—or, rather, fiats—of the Creator? How can I believe that—knowing what I know?

"But, on the other hand—well, take that lion, for instance: it was just like a terrestrial lion, save for the heavier mane, but, then, the manes of terrestrial lions differ. The Venusian lion and the earthly lion must have been placed upon their respective orbs by direct creative fiats of the Almighty—and are not the result of countless slight modifications produced by the incessant and pitiless struggle for existence and preserved by Natural Selection. Of course, evolution has always seemed to you a thing absurd; but you never took the trouble to learn anything at all about it."

"And so," I observed, "saved myself a lot of profitless trouble. For I was sure, all the time, that evolution was nothing but a pipe-dream."

"You so often are sure," he smiled. "Now, the data—"

"But I was right!" I cried triumphantly. "I was right. You yourself have said it."

"Now," he went on, "the data advanced by the evolutionists are unanswerable. To an impartial mind, a mind divested of preconceived opinions and bent on attaining the truth, evolution, when examined even cursorily, is an obvious thing. It is plain—plain as the sun and the moon are plain."

"Certainly," I said; "it is not the only error that is plain as day. That's a way errors have."

"Furthermore," Henry continued, "Darwinism adds sublimity to life, robs death of its terrors and gives a beautiful and orderly Universe instead of the capricious old one."

"Indeed!" I broke in. "That is just what it does not do. For it leaves the Cosmos the victim of blind, awful Chance."

"Haven't I told you a thousand times that there is no such thing as chance? That is only a name man has coined for something he doesn't understand."

"I can't see that."

"As I said, Rider, the evolutionary data are unanswerable. There is geological succession, homological structure and embryonic development, for instance. At a certain stage in their embryonic development, all vertebrates possess gill-arches. Why, if each species was separately created, is this thing so?"

"I might ask that superannuated question: Why is a hen?"

"If all the species can be traced back to a common ancestor, however, then this ontogenetic fact is easily explained; but, if each species is the result of a direct creative fiat, then this embryonic fact is a deep mystery, a mystery unsolvable."

"Well," I demanded, "what isn't a mystery—a mystery deep, unsolvable? You and I are mysteries, light and darkness, love and hate, life and death—everything."

"Granted. Ultimate knowledge never can be attained. And now, to come back, take homological structure. If the species are the results of special and independent creations, why is there such a thing as homological structure? Please tell me that. You can't."

"Of course I can't."

"If we accept Darwinism, however, the reason for its existence is at once plain. The hand of man, of Ornithorhynchus, the flipper of a seal, the paddle of a mole and the wing of a bat—different as these things and creatures are one to another—all arise from the same fundamental form. If evolution is, as you call it, a pipe-dream, why is this thing so? If each species was brought into the world by a special act of creation, why, Rider, are there structures so nearly identical in creatures so diverse?"

"Again, Professor," I said, "behold the hen!"

"Yes—why all this talk? For Venus has given us *an* answer—one as unmistakable as it is puzzling.

"One thing is certain," he went on in a changed voice: "we soon shall learn what these Venusian men are like. Perhaps, too—"

He broke off with an exclamation.

"Well?" I queried.

"There may be spoor down there."

"Why didn't you think of that before?"

"I return the question, Rider," he smiled. "Let's go see."

He took a brand from the fire, and, with this as a torch, we went down the bank.

We examined the ground at the spot where that unknown creature had glided into the bushes, but we found nothing there.

A little farther on, we came to stones that had been disturbed. I was examining one of these (it had been turned upside down) and the earth roundabout it when Henry, who had proceeded a few steps, suddenly exclaimed:

"Here it is!"

"What?" I asked, stepping forward.

He did not answer but pointed with his Winchester to the ground a couple of feet before him.

And there, in the soft earth contiguous to a little spring that welled up out of the sand, was a footprint—*the print of a naked human foot!*

The Third Installment of This Unusual Novel Will Appear in the February Issue of WEIRD TALES

Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith's New Novelette

The Hook of Death

The Story of a Haunted House

"AND YOU say this property's been mine for almost five years!" Jerry Calhoun stared incredulously at the wizened old lawyer.

"Your uncle died four years ago last January. We've been trying ever since to trace you," explained old Gideon Light, his wrinkled face as inscrutable as one of the yellowed law books in his dusty library.

Jerry Calhoun laughed. It was a refreshing boyish laugh, strangely out of keeping with the dry-as-dust formality of the old lawyer's office.

"To think I have been a property man all these years and didn't know it!" he chortled.

Old Gideon frowned slightly at his levity.

"The estate has remained in our hands, of course, since your uncle's death pending your return," he said a bit stiffly. "You'll find everything accounted for down to the last penny."

"I am sure of that," said Jerry quickly, giving the old lawyer an affectionate smile. "My uncle trusted you completely."

The lawyer opened a great ledger and began to tell off in his dry, monotonous voice the tale of the inheritance, so many stocks and bonds, so many shares in this and that. He paused irresolutely, with his pencil on the last item in the book, as if suddenly loathe to go on.

"The old place down in the country," he said, his voice altering subtly, "I am sorry to say, has netted no returns." He paused and frowned slightly.

"You mean my uncle's house down the river?" asked Jerry. "The old family home?"

The lawyer nodded.

"We have been unable to rent it," he said slowly. "I am afraid it has fallen into decay. We haven't been able for some time to get carpenters to do any work there, and last fall we even attempted to import city laborers without success. They left after one night." Again there was a peculiar note in the lawyer's voice.

"You don't mean I have inherited an ancestral ghost with the rest of it?" asked Jerry Calhoun excitedly.

Again the old lawyer frowned as if he resented the young man's levity.

"I don't know just what the trouble is," he replied, almost caustically, "but no one seems to want to pass a second night in the place. Even your uncle's faithful old servants fled within a month after his death."

"Don't tell me Uncle Davy has gone!" cried Jerry, with real disappointment. "He's the only person, strangely enough, I remember in connection with the place."

"Davy lives in the lodge at the gate," said Gideon Light. "He is a sort of caretaker. Not," he smiled grimly, "that a caretaker is especially needed. No one would go near the place at night, and I doubt if even Davy could be persuaded to enter the house after dark."

"Well, this is exciting," laughed Jerry Calhoun. "You have the keys to the old place, I suppose?"

Gideon Light started.

"You're going up to look it over?" he asked sharply.

"Not only to look it over," Jerry replied with a grin, "I think I'll settle there. I always had an affection for the old place."

Gideon Light's face altered curiously.

"I shouldn't advise that," he said earnestly. "I shouldn't advise that at all. Perhaps I haven't made it clear, but," his lips worked painfully, "there really is something in that old house, spirit or devil, I know not what. Anyway, I should strongly advise against your attempting to live there. Your uncle owned several residences in town, as well as a number of apartment buildings. You can be fixed up very comfortably in any one of them."

"Surely a man of your intelligence doesn't believe in ghosts, Mr. Light?" laughed Jerry Calhoun. The words did not ring quite true, however. There was something in the old lawyer's expression which froze the mirth on his lips. "Of course I'm going to live there. It is the home of my people. My mother was born there and her father before her. I am not afraid of ghosts. Give me the keys."

Gideon Light attempted another remonstrance, but the young man laughed it aside, and at last the old lawyer rose and, securing a bunch of keys from a safety box in his safe, handed them with much reluctance to his client.

"I'll have nothing to do with this, remember," he said, with a warning gesture. "You are acting directly against my advice. I wash my hands of all responsibility in the matter."

Jerry Calhoun laughed and tucked the keys into his pocket.

"My country home is only a mile from you by the highway," continued Gideon Light. "If you should change your mind and decide not to attempt the house after all, my daughter and I shall be glad to offer you the hospitality of our home."

Jerry was touched by the old lawyer's solicitude in his behalf.

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Light," he said, with a flash of his very white teeth. "If the ghosts prove too much for me, I may avail myself of your offer."

He shook the old lawyer's hand and turned toward the outer office. At that moment the door flew open, and a man and girl appeared on the threshold. The man was a large stocky-built fellow about thirty-five years of age with a round bullet head on which the greasy black hair was rapidly thinning. He had cold black eyes and a mottled face. He was dressed with a foppishness which irritated Jerry Calhoun. While the man was not bad-looking (he might even have been called handsome in a florid sort of way) despite his fastidiously-groomed person, there was something curiously repulsive about him.

In welcome contrast, the girl was altogether lovely, a slim, graceful creature with thick dark hair, cut close to her small, well-shaped head, and beautiful dark eyes, made darker and more seductive by the long black lashes which swept her clear, rose-pink cheeks.

"Aimée!" A smile transformed the old lawyer's face.

The girl went to him and he slipped an arm about her.

"And Rivers, how are you?" He turned as he spoke to the mottled-face man, the smile suddenly wiped as by a giant sponge from his withered lips.

"Fine, Giddy, old chap!" Jerry blinked. He had never imagined any one's taking liberties with old Gideon Light. "Couldn't be better." He slapped the little lawyer on the back and almost bent him double with the force of his mighty paw.

Gideon Light turned to Jerry.

"This is my daughter, Mr. Calhoun," his face lighted up as his eyes rested affectionately on the girl, "and," the light flickered out as if it had been turned off, "Mr. Stanley Rivers, her—her—" he paused and choked slightly.

"Her fiancé," Rivers finished for him.

Jerry experienced a sensation of shock. Was this lovely, exquisite young girl promised to that smug, oily fellow? He awoke suddenly to the fact that his too expressive face was registering his distaste at such a thought. Stanley Rivers was regarding him with narrowed eyes. Gideon Light had colored faintly and unconsciously tightened his arm about his daughter's waist. With an effort Jerry pulled himself together.

"We are to be neighbors, I think, Miss Light," he said, with an engaging smile. "Your father gives me to understand your country home is not more than a mile from the old Carewe place."

"Carewe!" the girl started. "Then you are Peter Carewe's—"

"Nephew," Jerry finished for her, with a second smile.

"But you do not intend to live at the Carewe place?" she asked, a little breathlessly.

"But I do!" laughed Jerry. "Or them's my intentions, if I am not rousted out by the family ghost!"

"But surely father has told you—Don't you know—"

"Mr. Calhoun is not one who can be told," interrupted her father dryly. "He insists on taking his own advice."

"However, he hasn't passed a night in the old house yet," remarked Stanley Rivers, with an unpleasant smile.

"That's true," conceded Jerry. "Perhaps I shall have to take to my heels before morning, and if I do," he smiled at the girl, "I shall take advantage of your father's offer and claim your hospitality, Miss Light."

With this remark he closed the door, and as it shut off his view he had a curious impression of a tense silence in the room he had quitted.

II

YEARS and years before, when he was a little tad, Jerry Calhoun had looked his last on this city near which his mother's family had lived for generations.

The Carewes were a wealthy and stiff-necked clan. They owned large properties in town as well as the historic family residence some ten miles or so up the river near where the latter emptied into the gulf. Theresa Carewe and Peter, her brother, had been the last of the name. Peter had never quite forgiven his sister for marrying handsome, happy-go-lucky Tom Calhoun whom he called a ne'er-do-well and a rolling stone.

Tom Calhoun *was* a vagabond, a gypsy at heart, but while his wife lived he settled down quietly enough in her old home and lived a very prosaic life. On her death, however, when Jerry was seven years old, he pulled up stakes and drifted away with the tide to the wandering, irresponsible life he liked best. Peter Carewe had thought the child should be left behind with his mother's people, but Tom Calhoun had refused fiercely, and, taking the boy with him, he had left, never to return.

When he died fifteen years later in Buenos Aires young Jerry was so impregnated with his father's will-o'-the-wisp spirit he had thought of nothing else but journeying gayly on, here today, there tomorrow. Consequently Peter Carewe had been dead more than four years before his lawyers succeeded in getting a line on his elusive nephew and heir.

Now, although in every sense of the word his father's own son, Jerry Calhoun was a Carewe too. He had tender

childish memories of his mother's stately old home up the river, and when the lawyer finally reached him he found himself suddenly tired of vagabondage and quietly anxious for a sight of the old place.

Although it was mid-afternoon before his conference with the old lawyer was concluded, Jerry had determined to go up to Carewe Landing, as the house was called, before evening. By water it was a good three hours' journey. The river made many turns and twists, but the scenery was beautiful. Jerry was determined to have a motor-boat. There was an excellent highway for automobiles; Jerry meant to have a machine, too. But, lacking both these, he had discovered that there was a local train which made Heaton, a village from which Carewe Landing was only about two miles distant.

He had just time to pick up his traveling bags from the hotel (Jerry traveled light and in these bags he carried all his worldly possessions) and make the local. It was a dirty, fussy little train, making innumerable stops, but, propping his feet up on the opposite seat, Jerry pulled his hat down over his eyes and went to sleep. Inconveniences meant nothing to him. He had traveled far, both east and west, and seldom had he traveled de luxe.

A healthy, well-set-up young chap, this Jerry Calhoun, not especially good looking, but with a lean, muscular body, as hard as nails, and an intrepid adventurous spirit. His eyes were a clear sparkling blue, his skin tan and ruddy, and his fair hair sunburned a crisp brown. He had the look of one who has tasted life and found it good.

Heaton was a sleepy little southern town. A dozen or more loafers met the train and eyed the one passenger who alighted in speculative silence. It was now close to sundown. Jerry approached a dilapidated hack which stood by the side of the small station and addressed the driver, a wooly-headed old negro.

"Is your hack for rent, uncle?" he asked.

The old darky eyed him curiously, switching his cud of tobacco from cheek to cheek.

"I reckon it is," he said after a while. "Where'd you want to go, suh?"

"To Carewe Landing," replied Jerry beginning to gather up his bags preparatory to settling them in the lop-sided vehicle.

"Carewe Landing!" The old negro started back. "Naw, suh, dis hack ain't for hire to go to no Carewe's Landing, not after dark."

Jerry laughed good-naturedly and tried the efficacy of a greenback—to no avail. The old negro was obdurate.

"Naw, suh," he said, "I needs the money, but money wouldn't do dis here nigger no good, daid."

And there the matter ended. Jerry then sought out the local garage, with no better results. No one in Heaton cared to earn the money, it seemed, for a trip to Carewe Landing after dark. The best he could do was to leave his bags behind him, with the understanding that they would be sent on in the morning, and set off afoot.

Jerry was not particularly averse to the walk. His healthy young body required exercise, and it was a singularly warm and pleasant afternoon for November. The trees were not entirely bare, and so he tramped along the highway brown leaves settled across his path. The weather was unseasonably warm, however, and a bank of sullen clouds to the north and west foreboded a storm.

The sun sank. The highway branched sharply off to the west at a large country residence set well back in a grove of poplar trees. Jerry judged that this was Gideon Light's property, his face clouding as he remembered the girl and the florid man who had so suavely announced himself her fiancé.

After leaving the Light home the highway was less frequented. Jerry met no one on the darkening road. The sky was slowly growing overcast with ominous clouds and there was a great stillness in the woods on either side, such a silence as precedes a thunder storm.

After a brisk fifteen minutes' walk Jerry came out suddenly from the dark tangle of trees that overlapped the road upon the river and Carewe's Landing.

The moon, not yet overshadowed by the gathering storm, illumined the gaunt old house and mirrored it in the softly lapping waters of the river. It was an enormous house, parts of it very old, but it had been rebuilt and added to by every generation until little of the original structure remained. It stood on a slight elevation in the very bend of the river so that it edged the water on two sides. The highway ended at the great stone wall which enclosed the property. Here there was a massive iron gate and a small lodge.

Jerry was amazed at the ruin which had overtaken the house. He remembered it as a stately place with rolling lawns and glistening verandas. Now it stood black and desolate. Porches sagged, and here and there a shutter, hanging by one hinge, flapped dismally in the rising wind. The grounds were a tangle of weeds and shrubbery, and from a tall cypress which overhung the river a rain crow croaked mournfully.

It looked what it was—a house deserted. The oncoming storm muttered sullenly in the distance, and as Jerry laid his hand upon the ancient bell a vivid flash of lightning flared in his very face so that he drew back startled. For a moment something ominous, something deadly, seemed to threaten him from the gaunt old house. Involuntarily, he remembered the old lawyer's warning. Then, with a reckless laugh, he pressed the bell. What was a ghost or two in his young life?

III

IT WAS several minutes before he received any answer. Then an old negro, palsied with age, appeared from the lodge, a lighted candle in his hand.

"Who be you?" he demanded sententiously, peering through the bars of the gate.

Jerry laughed.

"Why, it's me, Uncle Davy. Don't you remember me, Jerry Calhoun?"

The old negro was half blind with age and almost stone deaf, and it was some time before he could place the young man. After a time, however, his old face lighted up.

"Law, it's Massa Jerry," he cried, his old body trembling, "Miss Theresa's little Massa Jerry."

He unlocked the great gate with his unsteady hands and led the way toward the lodge. Here nothing would do but Jerry must let him serve a hastily prepared supper of fish, freshly caught from the river, and "co'n pone."

"Lawzy, young Massa, what brought you here dis time of night?" he asked after a time.

"Why, I've come to stay, Uncle Davy," cried Jerry. "I'm going to live here."

"*Live* here?" old Davy flung up his withered hands. "Lawd, Massa, ain't you heered dere's a debbil loose in his house, a evil sperit? You can't live here, young Massa."

Jerry laughed.

"I'm not afraid of ghosts, Davy, and I *am* going to live here." His jaw set when he made this remark, and those who knew him best would have argued the matter no further. "Come, let's have a look at the place. I want to pick out a bed for the night."

With old Davy still protesting feebly, Jerry led the way across the tangled yard to the large front entry. The steps

sagged beneath his weight, and again, as he laid his hand on the big brass doorknob, the lightning flared in his very face.

"Dat's a sign, dat's a warning!" cried the old negro, drawing back, almost tearfully. "Don't go in, Massa, don't tempt your fate!"

Jerry laughed and, turning the key in the lock, pushed the door open.

"Are the lights disconnected, Davy?" he asked.

"Naw, suh, lights and everything's just as the old massa left it. Mr. Gideon left word not to disturb nothing."

Jerry, with his candle, found the switch and at his touch the lower floor leaped into light. It was exactly as he remembered it, only gray with dust. Rats scurried away at their approach, and he felt a twinge of anger at the neglect into which the once fine old house had fallen. Nothing had been disturbed, however. The great double parlors on the right, the library and dining-room on the left, the big kitchens and scullery—he had but to close his eyes to see them as they had been in his mother's day.

"Well, things are not so bad as I feared," he said to Davy. "Turn a couple of scrub women loose in here a day or two, and it will begin to look natural. Now suppose we pick out my quarters."

He had suddenly remembered a suite of rooms on the first floor, just back of the double parlors. It consisted of bedroom, bath, and sitting-room, and overlooked the river. There was an outside entrance, and in every way it struck him as most suitable for his purpose. Davy followed him dubiously through the deserted house to this isolated spot.

"This will do admirably," cried Jerry, his face brightening.

The rooms were furnished with Spartan simplicity, but, once clear of dust, he was sure they would be comfortable enough.

"Can you fix me up for meals and bedding until I get some one in to clean up the house, Davy? It'll take a whole pack of servants to run this big place, but I'll do well enough if you can take care of me a day or two."

"I can take care of you, suh," said the old negro, scratching his grizzled head, "but please, young Massa, don't try to stay up here. Dere's a debbil loose in dis house, shore as you're born. Come on down to the lodge and sleep. Don't try to stay in dis old house."

Jerry laughed heartily and brushed the old negro's fears aside. Nevertheless, when he had been made as comfortable as possible and old Davy had gone off muttering and shaking his head, he was conscious of a singular feeling of depression. Keys in hand, he made the rounds of the old mansion, locking every door and examining the fastenings of every window.

He paused for a long time in the great dusty library to stare up at a huge portrait which occupied a panel in the outer wall. It was his uncle's portrait, Peter Carewe of Carewe Landing, last of his name. Jerry stared thoughtfully into his uncle's dark saturnine face. There was little resemblance between them. Peter Carew was as dark and unsmiling as his nephew was fair. There was a lowering, almost menacing expression in his sallow face, and his stern mouth was set in forbidding lines.

He was a sparely built man with hauteur in every line of him, and his right hand was thrust forward defiantly as if he dared any one to think he was sensitive about his infirmity. For his right hand was cut off at the wrist and in its place, strapped tight to the stump, was a great iron hook!

It was this hook which drew Jerry's eyes. It had always fascinated him, the grim, hideous iron thing. As a child he had never been able to look away from it, although he realized even then that his unwinking scrutiny angered his uncle, who, despite his defiant attitude, was furiously sensitive about his missing hand.

The storm had begun in earnest by the time Jerry returned to his own quarters. The suite which he had selected was built in an L shape. The bedroom opened off the house proper by a single door. The sitting-room extended from it at right angles and occupied the furthermost point in the bend of the river, with an outside door and windows on three sides, commanding a splendid view of the river. It was for this view he had remembered and chosen the suite.

The storm had brought a chill to the night, and old Davy had kindled a fire in the granite fireplace in the sitting-room. Flinging himself down in a chair, Jerry stared thoughtfully into the crackling flames. The rain beat against the house, the wind lashed it. Again and again the thunder roared, the lightning flashed.

Jerry was strangely wide awake. Something, probably the tales he had heard about the deserted house, made him curiously conscious of every sound in the gaunt old mansion, of which there were many. He had never known a house so alive with stealthy, furtive sounds. Calm reason assured him these noises were nothing more than the rats in the deserted rooms overhead or the wind rattling the dangling shutters, still he could not deny he liked them not, these stealthy sounds.

Somehow, little by little as the fire died on the hearth, coal by coal, every nerve in his body grew tense. The muscles in his hands stood out like whipcords where he gripped the arms of the chair. Sweat started to his brow. He realized suddenly that he was staring with bulging eyes straight before him. Suddenly, without a flicker as warning, the lights flared up and went out. He was in utter darkness, a pulsing sensate darkness that seemed to rise in waves and beat against his face.

He could neither move nor speak. He hardly dared breathe. His heart fluttered like a wild thing in his breast and climbed up into his throat.

Then—he was aware of a presence. He was no longer alone. Somewhere near him in the vibrant darkness, there was something, he knew not what.

His hair prickled on his scalp. His breath died away in his throat. Faintly, through the darkness, something was glowing with a dull luminosity.

Jerry's eyes fixed upon it. He could not tear them away. It was as if he were bound by some dreadful spell. For between him and the wall, floating in space, he saw a hideous thing—*the stump of an arm and a glistening iron hook!*

IV

HOW long he sat there, his eyes fixed upon this awful sight, he never knew. Suddenly the glow which had attended the phenomenon vanished. There was a deathly silence. The darkness whirled and eddied about him, and then, suddenly, the lights flared up, dazzling him for the moment with their brilliance. He was alone.

Rising with an effort, Jerry ran to examine the doors and windows. Each was securely bolted. He stared wildly about him. Outside the wind shrieked like a mad thing and hurled itself at the gaunt old house as if it would tear it to pieces. Drawing his trembling hand across his damp brow, Jerry tried to compose his shaking limbs. For the first time in his life he had tasted fear, and it had left him shaken in body and soul.

The first thing Jerry did on arising in the morning was to set about securing scrubwomen to clean up the old house. But this he found easier said than done. Although Uncle Davy hitched up his ramshackle old cart and together they scoured the neighborhood, it was only by the most seductive promises he secured the services of three black mam-

mies, and these had it distinctly understood in the bargain that their duties began after sunrise and ended before sundown.

With the odor of soapsuds and opened windows, the old mansion began to take on a more habitable air. Jerry's bags arrived, and, his own quarters having been thoroughly renovated, he felt more at home. He had negotiated a deal with the garage man for a natty red roadster, and, having set a trio of ragged negro boys to work, soon had the driveway sufficiently cleared out to back his machine into the long deserted carriage-house.

Uncle Davy received all these preparations for a permanent residence with gloomy forebodings, at which Jerry only laughed. If the strange apparition of the night had left the young man slightly paler, if his voice rang a little less true, it had not lessened his determination to make Carewe Landing his home. In the broad light of day he was inclined to make light of his ghostly experience, nor was he willing to admit that he had been in a state of sheer funk at the time.

In the afternoon he decided to try out his new roadster and at the same time pay his respects to his nearest neighbors, the Lights. After the storm of the night before the air had a delightful nip and tang, which restored the color to his tanned cheeks. The red roadster sang like a bird beneath its master's hand and Jerry's heart sang, too, but he would not admit, not even to himself, that a great part of the gladness pulsing in his breast was at the thought of seeing Aimée Light again.

Gideon Light called his country place The Poplars from the stately grove of trees in which it stood. It was comparatively new, a large brick house with stone pillars, sheared and velvety lawns on each side, and a rolling golf course at the back. Jerry was conscious of a faint resentment at its glistening perfection as compared with the ravished and desolated house he had left behind.

He found Aimée Light alone in a large sun parlor at the right of the house. She was reclining languidly on a wicker chaise longue. Canary birds sang in cages about her. The place was bright with blooming flowers and silken cushions, and yet there was something about the girl's listless figure and grave unsmiling eyes, staring a bit blankly before her, which sent a pang to Jerry's heart, he knew not why. She was too young to be so tired and languid.

At his approach she sprang to her feet, and, on recognizing him, a peculiar expression (he had almost said, of dread, had there been anything in his eager brown face to awaken dread in her heart) leaped into her lovely dark eyes.

"You—have—decided to leave—that place?" she asked jerkily.

Jerry laughed.

"I should say not!" he cried. "I have moved in. I am only paying a neighborly call."

The girl turned so pale he feared for a moment she was going to faint. Then she put out her trembling hands and clung to his sleeve.

"But you must go away!" she cried earnestly. "You must leave that awful place! Do not risk another night in that terrible house!"

Jerry was both astonished and pleased by this plea, uttered as it was in a low and shaken voice. He was touched that this beautiful girl should be so solicitous about his safety. He was amazed that she should show such horror of his house.

"I think you are unnecessarily alarmed," he said gently, taking her cold little hands in his. "Really, I think the old place has been maligned. I am very anxious to make it my home. I have a warm affection in my heart for it, and," his jaw set, "I have no intention of being scared away!"

"But you do not know!" She was trembling violently. "I assure you, you are in grave danger. Do not trifle with it. I beg you, leave! Leave that house without an hour's delay!"

"But, Miss Light, I do not see—" Jerry began, and then broke off abruptly.

The girl was staring past him with a sort of frozen horror on her white face. He turned, her hands still clasped in his. On the threshold stood Stanley Rivers, his cold black eyes narrowed to pencil points, his upper lip drawn back in a snarling grimance. Mechanically, Jerry dropped the girl's hands.

"Ah, here is our brave ghost breaker!" cried the older man, advancing into the room. The ugly smile had vanished from his face, but Jerry knew as he looked into the cold black eyes that in Stanley Rivers he had a mortal enemy. "Are you ready to cry quits, young man?"

"Not by any means!" cried Jerry, his blue eyes matching the cold black ones for insolence. "I like the old house—and—I am going to stay."

"Stay?" Stanley Rivers echoed the word a bit blankly, his heavy brows drawing in an ominous scowl. "You haven't had enough, eh?"

"No," said Jerry shortly, and, turning his back on the man to whom he had taken such an instant dislike, he spoke to the girl, "I really must be going. I only ran over to say good bye."

He held out his hand. The girl's fingers tightened and clung about his, as if she were trying to convey some message to him, while her dark eyes besought him dumbly.

Jerry moved toward the door. Stanley Rivers had drawn nearer to the girl. It seemed to Jerry she shrank from the contact.

"There—there is a little dance at the Country Club tonight, Mr. Calhoun," she said, flushing suddenly. "Won't you come?"

It was on Jerry's tongue to refuse, but something in Stanley Rivers' eyes warned him that the man was annoyed at his fiancee's suggestion. For some reason Jerry's presence at the Country Club was highly distasteful to him, and in a fit of sheer perversity Jerry accepted the girl's invitation. Nor did he miss the dark flush which stained Rivers' mottled face at that acceptance nor the glad little smile which curved Aimée Light's wistful red lips.

On his way home Jerry puzzled over the pair he had just quitted. It had repelled him from the first, the idea that this lovely dark-eyed girl was promised to a man of Stanley Rivers' type, and somehow, now that he had seen them together, he resented the fact still more. He was convinced not only that Aimée did not love the man to whom she was engaged, but even that she was repelled and frightened by him. It was terror and nothing else Jerry had surprised in her eyes when Stanley Rivers appeared in the doorway, and he was not blind to the fact that she shrank from any contact with the fellow. Why, then, had she engaged herself to him?

It could not be for financial reasons. Everything pointed to great prosperity on Gideon Light's part, this magnificent new country home with its costly furnishings, to say nothing of certain valuable properties which the little lawyer owned in town. No, there was no earthly reason why Gideon Light's daughter should marry for money, and from what he had seen in the office he fancied that Stanley Rivers was no favorite of the old solicitor. Then why had Aimée given herself to this fellow with his mottled face and cold black eyes?

Jerry was one of the last to arrive at the Country Club. He had taken great precautions to see that the great house was carefully bolted and secured for the

night before he left. Letting himself out by the outer door in his sitting-room, he stood for a moment staring back at the darkened house. The wing which contained his quarters had been built in the very bend of the river and the steps by which he had emerged were continued a little farther on in a second flight leading down to a narrow wharf or landing from which the house took its name. The waters lapped softly about this landing and the white timbers rose and fell gently with the even breath of the river.

The club ballroom was crowded when Jerry appeared in the doorway. Knowing no one, he was on the point of turning away when Aimée passed in her fiancé's arms. Over Stanley Rivers' shoulder her eyes encountered Jerry. Instantly a soft wave of color shot into her delicate face. Jerry's pulses hammered.

"The next? May I have the next dance?" he whispered.

She nodded. Stanley Rivers turned. His face darkened when he recognized the man in the doorway and, scowling, he lost himself and his partner in the maze of the dance.

Two men, strangers to Jerry, were conversing at his right.

"Is Gideon Light really going to allow his daughter to marry that man?" said one, making a wry face at Stanley Rivers' retreating back.

"It looks like it," replied the other.

"I don't understand it. Does any one know anything about the fellow? Where'd he come from? Who is he? What's his business?"

"I don't know. He came here from up east, he says, on a land deal of some sort, got in with Gideon Light in some way, and has been here ever since."

"But what does he do? What's his line? He's always got money. What's his business?"

"Can't say," replied the other nonchalantly. "He's in and out of town a good deal, has an office in our building, always has a string of fellows running in and out, strangers to me; I never saw any of them. He seems to keep them busy though. I believe I did hear he was thinking of buying some land somewhere between the old Carewe place and Gideon Light's country house."

"That's some house! Old Giddy certainly must have struck it rich lately. It takes the lawyers to drag in the coin. Ten years ago Gideon Light was a poor man."

At this minute the music ended and Jerry set himself to hunt out Aimée and claim his dance. Stanley Rivers frowned when the younger man approached, and there was something almost malicious in Jerry's smile as he bore Aimée away. Yet somehow there was little he found to say. The girl's sweetness, her wistful beauty tied his tongue.

They danced. She was like a flower in his arms. His breath quickened. Unconsciously, his arms tightened about her. He wondered if she were conscious of his heart throbbing against hers. He stole a glance at her sweet averted face. She glanced up. Their eyes met and clung. The world rocked about him. For a moment they two were alone, man and woman, alone in all the world.

Then the music ended with a crash, and Stanley Rivers, with a sneering smile on his smug face, claimed his fiancée and took her away.

V

JERRY did not dance again. Somehow, the sweetness of the girl still lingered in his arms. He could not profane her place with another.

His blood was on fire as he raced his engine through the night. It had been his boast that he was a man's man. Women had had little to do with his scheme of life. Now, all at once, he knew that life meant nothing to him but the girl he had left behind him, dancing in Stanley Rivers' arms.

The old house stood gaunt and silent against the night when he returned. Having put up the roadster, he made his way slowly around to the steps which led up to his own quarters, and let himself in. The rooms were comfortable and his own possessions had been scattered about, and yet it was less cheerful than he had expected. Somehow, the calm with which he had come to regard his experience of the night before left him in the midnight loneliness, and to his chagrin he felt something like dread creeping over him.

Determined not to yield to this singular depression, Jerry resolutely locked the door behind him and having, as on the preceding night, tested each door and window to see that it was securely fastened, he prepared for bed. It went decidedly against his grain to acknowledge anything supernatural about the curious phenomenon which he had witnessed the night before and he had prepared an experiment.

Since the doors and windows had not been tampered with, he was convinced of one of two things: either there were duplicate keys or there was some other mode of entry to the room. With these old houses anything was possible. There might be a secret panel somewhere in the wall. He had supplied himself with a paper sack of flour. This he sprinkled very carefully around the walls in both rooms, hemming himself in with a magic white circle.

"We'll see if Mr. Ghost leaves any footprints," he said to himself, with a grim smile.

When he had finished he switched off the lights and went to bed, taking care to place an electric torch beneath his pillow. He had determined to lie awake and wait for the demonstration, if there were any. But it was very late. He had had a long and strenuous day. After a time his eyes grew heavy. He made a desperate effort to hold them open and failed. Slowly but surely he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was to a dull, yet strangely luminous glow. He recognized it instantly. It was the light that had accompanied his ghostly visitor on the night before, and at the same moment he beheld, poised apparently in midair not a foot from his startling eyes, that hideous stump with its menacing hook!

For a second he could not breathe. Instinctively, he shrank back, but he was powerless to lift a hand. Nearer and nearer moved the deadly hook. He cringed. He would have cried out, but his tongue was a leaden thing in his mouth.

Slowly, inch by inch, the ghastly thing approached. There was a deathly cloying sweetness in the air. Jerry summoned every effort to turn his eyes away. He could not stir.

Another moment, and the ghastly hook would rip his throat from ear to ear. He began to pray for anything to end the ghastly suspense. He felt the cold, clammy metal upon his skin, shivered, cried out—and knew no more.

WHEN Jerry's spirit shuddered back to consciousness the room was in utter darkness. For a moment he lay trembling, his brow dewed with cold sweat. Then he sprang to his feet and turned on the light. The room was exactly as he had left it, doors and windows securely bolted, nor had the virgin whiteness of the flour which he had spread about the floor been disturbed.

For a moment Jerry's head reeled. Was he to admit, after all, that there was something supernatural about this weird thing which beset him? How could any human agency enter and leave at will a room which was securely fastened against all entrance, and leave no trace? Was it a devil as old Davy insisted, an evil spirit that haunted this place? Had that sinister and malevolent hook, which Peter Carewe had used in life, refused to lie silent in the tomb with its master?

Had it usurped a deadly and awful life of its own?

In the morning these speculations struck the young man as absurd and ridiculous. Despite the fact that it seemed impossible for a human agency to be at bottom of these manifestations, Jerry was convinced that there was some natural explanation for the weird occurrences if only he could fathom it.

For some reason, his presence in the old mansion was resented. Some one was determined to drive him from the house and he was equally positive it was no ghost, nothing supernatural, that was moving heaven and earth to create a solitude in this particular place.

That peculiar cloying sweetness which had accompanied his weird experience of the night had given him a clue, and something else had excited his curiosity. It had struck his attention that while everything else about the old house had been allowed to go to ruins the landing beneath his window had been but recently rebuilt of strong white timber. This was an incongruity for which he could not account. Even in his uncle's day the landing had been a thing of the past. When the house was built the river had been the sole thoroughfare. Now it was abandoned, since automobiles and locomotives had made its method of travel too leisurely for an impatient new generation. Yet the fact stood out that the landing alone was in perfect repair.

Long before the charwomen arrived for their day's work, Jerry went for a swim. There was something he wished to see with his own eyes. Uncle Davy himself was just rising when his young master returned to the house.

In the afternoon Jerry went for a spin in his roadster, pausing for a moment, though such had not been his intention, at Gideon Light's place. Somehow he had found it impossible to go by. He was drawn, as a needle is drawn to the magnet, to the girl who from the moment he had first seen her had absorbed all his thoughts.

Stanley Rivers was in the lower hall when Jerry rang the bell. He saw him distinctly through the glass panel at the side of the door. As the butler started to answer the bell, Rivers beckoned him and whispered into the man's ear, disappearing immediately afterward into the interior of the house.

"Miss Light is not at home," said the butler. This although Jerry had seen the flutter of her white skirts in the sunroom.

For a moment the young man was tempted to smash in the butler's smug face, then, realizing violence could not aid his cause, he flung off in a pet. As his car roared down the avenue he saw Stanley Rivers' face grinning at him sardonically from an upper window.

True to their promise, the negro women left at sundown, and when Jerry reached the house, after dining at the Country Club, the dusk had settled wanly. Old Davy had retired to the lodge, but in Jerry's own quarters a fire had been kindled. Turning on the light, he sat down beside the fading coals. The night was cloudless, but the wind soughed restlessly about the house, and once again Jerry was conscious of the countless furtive noises which encompassed him.

A log broke on the hearth, sending up a shower of sparks. Jerry started, his lips tightening, his hand instinctively flying to his hip pocket, and at that instant there was the sharp tinkle of breaking glass and a stone crashed through one of the windows facing the river and rolled to his feet. For a moment Jerry did not move. Then he snatched up the missile. A bit of dirty paper was wound about it. He tore it loose and read:

"Get out within the hour, or you'll go out in a coffin."

Jerry read this sinister note a second and third time, then he turned toward the broken window through which it had come and smiled grimly.

"Ghosts don't write notes," he said. "Somebody wants me out of here mighty bad, but—" and his face hardened—"somebody's made a fatal mistake. I don't scare worth a cent."

It was ten o'clock by his watch. His ghostly visitor was unlikely to appear before midnight. Putting out all the lights, Jerry sat down to wait. There was no going to bed for him tonight. With flashlight in easy reach and an ominous blue-black revolver in his hip pocket, he assumed his vigil. He was taking no chances. He knew he was dealing with desperate men. He felt sure they meant to play their trump card tonight and he was prepared for any expedient.

An hour, an hour and a half, passed. By the radiant dial of his watch he saw it lacked fifteen minutes of midnight. Every nerve in his body grew taut. The moment was almost at hand.

Suddenly there came a cautious tapping at the outer door. For a moment he sat perfectly still. Then every drop of blood in his body leaped as a low voice spoke his name. It was a woman's voice.

Leaping across the room, he unbolted the door, and flung it noiselessly open. Upon the threshold, a dark cape wrapped about her, stood Aimée Light!

VI

JERRY drew her after him into the room. She was breathing rapidly as if she had been running.

"Thank God, I am in time!" she panted. "You must not stay here another minute. Quick! your very life is in danger!"

She clung to him in an agony of terror. Jerry's blood quickened to a tumult in his veins. She loved him, this starry-eyed girl! Every accent of her low anguished voice told him so. She loved him, and she had risked everything to save him!

"Beloved!" his arms closed about her, the sweetness of her raced through him. he drew her to him, his lips met hers. He grew giddy with their clinging rapture.

"Beloved!" he cried again but the words died on his lips, for with a dreadful cry Aimée had torn herself from his embrace. She drew back, and between them, hideous with its menacing glow, Jerry saw the iron hook!

There was a blinding flash, a deafening report. Lights flared up suddenly. A great hole yawned in the sitting-room floor, a trap-door, and beside it, crouched like a leopard for its spring, stood Stanley Rivers!

He was dressed in black, even his face was smeared with charcoal. On one arm he wore an iron hook, strapped on with leather thongs and made luminous with phosphorus. He was glaring with baleful eyes and snarling updrawn lips at Jerry, who, one arm about Aimée, leveled a pistol full at the rascal's heaving breast.

"Our friend, the ghost!" cried Jerry, his blue eyes narrowing ominously, his finger tightening on the trigger. His face hardened. "The jig's up, Rivers, I'm on to your game. You made a bad blunder when you rubbed the hook with the stuff. Of course, you didn't know I spent five years in the tropics as Deputy Narcotic Agent. I know that smell, Rivers, and the minute I caught a whiff of it I was on to your game."

Stanley Rivers said nothing, but his heavy face turned pasty.

"Today in my uncle's desk I came across certain papers," Jerry went on. "I know now why you came here. Somehow, you got hold of the fact that Gideon Light had misused some of my uncle's funds. You went to my uncle and offered to sell your information. He had you thrown out of his house.

"Unfortunately, just then my uncle died—and you went to Gideon Light with threats of exposure. But he had no money to pay. Then a daring scheme entered your mind. Carewe's Landing formed an ideal base for smuggling dope in from Mexico. By means of motor-boats the stuff could be brought in at night from some schooner safely anchored out in the gulf. An underground trench could be dug from the landing to the house, with an exit by means of a trapdoor in this very room. This morning I went swimming, and I not only traversed your underground passage way but even examined the cellar where your supplies are stored.

"Having compelled Gideon Light, by threatening him with ruin, to accede to your scheme, you proceeded to put your villainy into execution. Having bought yourself an iron hook similar to that worn by my uncle, you terrorized every one who entered the place until it was finally deserted to your pleasure. You scared every one in the neighborhood so thoroughly no one would come near the place at dark. The only guard was a palsied old negro, half blind and nearly deaf with old age. Once or twice a month your schooner arrived and its cargo was stored in the cellar, from which at your leisure the goods were slipped away in trucks under cover of night by the villainous crew you brought in with you.

"Not content with your ill-gotten wealth, you next demanded that Gideon Light give you his daughter's hand. By this time he was cowed body and soul. He dared not refuse. Then—I arrived on the scene. Unfortunately I did not scare. You came here tonight determined to be rid of me even at the cost of murder. But your plans have failed. I have notified the authorities in town of the whole plot. Your office has been raided. Your confederates are already in jail and a posse is on its way here to confiscate your illegal goods and carry you, most noble ghost, to prison."

"Is that so?" cried Stanley Rivers, his thick lips writhing furiously, his bestial face convulsed with rage. "Do you think, you young whippersnapper, you can outwit *me!* My boat lies at the landing. I'll have you yet and the girl, too, before your posse arrives!"

As he spoke, he lunged forward like a maddened bull. The revolver fell from Jerry's hand at that unexpected onslaught. Rivers' mighty arms shot out, encircling the younger man, and together they crashed to the floor, writhing over and over together, the larger man seeking furiously to rip the younger man's throat with the hideous hook on his right arm.

Terrified, her eyes dilating in her white face, Aimée watched that desperate struggle, too fearful of the outcome to turn her gaze for a second. Rivers was by far the bulkier of the two, but Jerry was as lithe as an eel, and again and again he writhed away from that cruel hook as it would have ripped his throat.

Back and forth they lashed upon the floor. At length, by an almost superhuman effort, Jerry struggled to his feet. Rivers dashed at him, the murderous hook glistening in the light. Aimée shuddered and tried to tear her eyes away. Rivers bellowed like a savage beast and drove straight at Jerry's heart.

The younger man's fist shot out, landed full on the heavy, mottled jaw. Rivers groaned and reeled back. His foot struck the pistol which he had jarred from Jerry's hand. Uttering a cry of furious triumph, he stooped and sought to seize the weapon with his left hand. Somehow, they never knew how, in his maddened haste he lost his balance and fell headfirst into the dark cavern where the trap-door yawned on the blackness of the underground passage.

There was a dull thud, a shuddering groan, then silence.

Kneeling, Jerry flashed his pocket torch into the abysmal darkness. Rivers lay where he had fallen in a shapeless huddle, his head bent under the weight of his heavy body. He was quite dead, his arms sprawled out, the hook gleaming like an evil thing at his side.

"Aimée!" Jerry drew the shuddering, trembling girl into his arms. "Do not cry. Your troubles are over. The 'ghost' is dead. Your father is freed, and—" the words caught in his throat—"I love you."

Aimée, looking up through her tears, tried to smile as she laid her head on his shoulder, and, for the second time, she surrendered him her lips.

Physician Discovers Truth Serum

PHYSICIANS and noted criminologists all over the country have been interested in the experiments recently conducted by Dr. R. E. House, a Texas physician, for compelling prisoners to tell the truth.

The "truth serum," as it is known, is not a new drug to medical science. It is a drug known as scopolamin which Dr. House previously had used to produce "twilight sleep." It was from his observations while engaged in this line that the idea was conceived of using the drug to make prisoners talk while in a state of subconsciousness.

Under the influence of scopolamin, the subject loses use of his conscious will, but retains his memory and answers truthfully all questions that are asked him while he is under the influence of the drug.

Recent experiments conducted by Dr. House at San Quentin prison have proved almost beyond a doubt that this method will prove a boon to criminal investigators.

While conducting these experiments at San Quentin, Dr. House proved conclusively that certain criminals who had been convicted of crime, but under circumstantial conditions, were not guilty. A war hero was found serving a sentence for larceny, a crime he had forgotten. The experiment brought out the fact that he committed the crime while suffering a lapse of memory, due to shell shock, and that he was a son of a prominent Belgian. Another prisoner revealed crimes in which he had participated; crimes of which the police were not aware had been committed.

Now, a prominent Texas attorney, having heard of the success of the experiments in California, has decided to have the serum used on two negroes who are being held for robbery and in which there is a doubt as to their guilt.

Whether the serum and its benefits will prove sufficiently reliable to be admitted as court evidence remains to be seen. The success so far obtained, however, is sufficient to cause considerable discussion and, should it prove successful, will go another step forward in crime suppression and equalled only by the finger print system.—B. C. Reber.

An Extraordinary Tale
Told in a Droll Manner

The Monstrosity

By GEORGE W. CRANE

WELL, well, so you're the new feller what's thinkin' o' buyin' that piece o' property out near the graveyard, are ye? And ye wants ter know the strange story what's circulatin' 'round 'mongst the villagers? I guess, newcomer, that ye've come to the right party when ye come ter me, fer I've run this here store and post office nigh onto twenty-seven year, come next September.

But I'll 'gin ter explain 'bout that there doctor. Anyways, we allus thought he wuz a medicine man o' some sort. He come in on the train one afternoon, and 'fore nightfall had put up the price o' that old house in cold cash. Lem Higgins wuz s'prised as a kid that sees Santy Claus comin' down the chimbley, cause the doc didn't look any too well off. But the little shriveled-up old codger jest reached down in that there black satchel what he wuz carryin' and pulled her out —all gold 'n silver.

Howsoever I'm fergittin' part o' my story. There wuz a boy along with him. He must have been near eighteen year old, I sh'd jedge, but he wuz blind, so the doc said. Leastways, he had to be led 'round by the hand, and he wore big black specs o' some kind. Well, Slim Asbury down street thinks he's goin' ter do a little business sellin' the doc some furniture what he's had stored up in the loft.

Slim, he's a sort o' second-hand man; leastways, that's what ye'd call him in a town o' any size. But, 'tany rate, he thinks he'll unload part of the household stuff he's been collectin' these ten year or so, but Slim, he wuz shore fooled. 'Twarn't long till one o' the freight cars stopped down to the station, and unloaded a big lot o' goods with this here doc's name on 'em. Most o' the stuff wuz furniture.

Then a couple o' days later there come some more boxes of live animules. They wuz some of them pigs what the doc had to 'speriment on, and there wuz a big box what we never see'd into. Howsoever, Hank Squires, who's our constable, when he ain't away huntin' squirrels, says he thinks he heerd that thing in the big box sort o' whine and growl; so Hank says it wuz some kind o' wild varmint. 'Course nobody ever see'd it, but we wuz mostly willin' ter take Hank's word, knowing that he's sort o' 'thority on wild critters, anyways.

Well, the doc hired the stuff took out to the old house—this one what you're thinkin' o' buyin'—and he got settled down in two or three days. We all sort o' thought he might take some cases, 'cause we don't have no reg'lar doc here, bein's it's so small, but no, he don't seem ter expect to do no work. Must have made his money in the city, we figgers it out.

Oncet or twice a week the doc comes down here to my store after some bacon and flour and sugar. He's allus leadin' that boy 'round with him. I used ter think maybe I could git him ter tell me somethin' 'bout hisself, but the doc, he wuz a quiet sort. Leastways, he never spoke much 'round here. Oncet in a long while he'd git a letter from some furrin place. I spelt out one o' the names oncet. 'Twuz some doc in Vienny —over in Yurope, that is, if ye've never heered o' it before. Leastways, that's what the school marm said 'twuz, and she wuz boardin' at my place then and she's powerful smart.

Must have been nigh onto a year passed with things jest as I've been tellin' ye. Then it come that cold winter two year ago, and we had a deep snow. I 'member 'twuz after supper one night and Slim Asbury wuz settin' back there behind the stove playin' checkers with Hank Squires. I wuz jest finishin' sweepin' out the front o' the store—never used ter do it till that new school marm come along with them fool newfangled notions 'bout bein' sanitary—when all to oncet, in run Jess Cooper. He'd been startin' out ter see his girl over 'long the mounting road, and I wuz shore s'prised ter see him, knowin' as I did that he'd jest set out 'bout half-hour before. They's nothin' that ever kept Jess from his ride out there, and I wuz plumb astonished. Jess, he wuz that out o' breath he jest couldn't speak fer nigh onto a minute.

"Where's Hank?" says he, soon's he kin speak.

"Why," says I, "be ye blind all to oncet? Hank's settin' right there back o' the stove."

"Well," says he, "I've never come so close to death in all my life and got away with it."

"And how's that?" says I.

'Bout this time Hank has heerd Jess talkin', and he come ter see what's wrong.

"Why," says Jess, "some wild varmin't been chasin' me all the way back from the ridge over on the mounting road near Slocum's."

"What kind o' varmint wuz it?" asks Hank, curious-like.

"Couldn't see that," says Jess, "but 'twuz shore some powerful big critter. His eyes wuz big as my fists, and they wuz 'bout as high off the ground as my head. I wuz ridin' 'long on my way ter see 'Lizabeth tonight, this bein the night I allus goes out there as ye know, rain or shine, when all to oncet my horse shies. But I can't make out what 'tis.

"Then I goes 'long a little farther, and the horse, he shies agin. Still I don't see nothin', but I'm wishin' 'bout that time that I'd brung along my Winchester. The next time the horse shies I thinks ter myself, 'Here's where ye must figger this out, oncet fer all.' Well, then's when I see'd them eyes—big, green, yaller things, they is, and they starts towards me. Snow come up nigh to the horse's belly, but do ye know, them eyes wuz higher'n the horse's back. Well, I says ter myself, bein's I hain't got no gun, 'Jess,' says I,' ye'd better not go ter see 'Lizabeth tonight.'

"Well, as I wuz sayin', the thing started fer me; so I jest wheeled my horse 'round, and we wuz on our way back agin fast as he could plow through them drifts. But that thing, it kept in sight o' me part way back."

NOW I hain't never laid no claims ter bein' an expert o' wild varmints, but bein's Hank, he knows 'em purty well, I says ter him, "Hank," says I, "what varmint is that?"

Hank, he chewed a while longer 'fore he 'sponds. Then he spits terbaccy juice onto my clean floor and says, "Danged 'f I know."

Now Hank, he ain't no fool by no means, and when he says he don't know, 'tain't many mounting folks what does.

Well, stranger, it snowed some more that night; so when Hank and Jess goes out there next mornin' ter the mounting road, why they don't see no tracks o' any sort; leastways, no animule tracks. Hank, he tells me he kinder doubts 'bout Jess, though the lad ain't been givin' ter drinkin' much, and has never see'd things before.

We don't hear nothin' more 'bout that there green-eyed varmint fer somewheres o' two weeks. During that time the doc, he comes down fer some meat. I ain't see'd him fer a long spell; so I 'splains 'bout that there yaller-eyed critter. The doc, he looks sort o' scared-like; so I says, "Doc, ye don't know nothin' 'bout it, do ye?"

Ye see, stranger, I sort o' figgered that the doc has lost that big wild critter what come in the box. I ain't 'splained my s'picions ter Hank, but I figgered that wuz the real solution. Well, the doc, he says he don't know nothin' 'bout any varmint like that, but he looks sort o' funny when he says it.

I don't say nothin' more 'long that line, howsoever, but asks him 'bout the boy—bein's he ain't been down ter my store now fer a spell o' nigh onto six weeks. The doc had told me he wuz ailin'; so now I asks him how the lad's feelin' by this time. The doc says, though, that he wuz feelin' tolable better. Howsoever, the doc hisself looks powerful porely; so I tells him he must perk up a bit, or he'll be down, too.

'Fore he leaves fer home, he hands me a letter—me bein' the postmaster here—and it wuz goin' ter that old doc over there in Vienny. The doc's hand shook like a mounting pine in a storm, as he held the letter in his fingers; so I says ter him, "Doc, ye'd better make yoreself some yaller root tea."

Stranger, he jest looks at me a minute, and then 'gins ter laugh like he wuz hearin' some good joke. I 'gins ter think he's goin' plumb looney.

Well, that's the last I see'd o' the doc; leastways, the last he is ever at my store.

Hank, he ain't been able ter figger out what the varmint is, an' neither have I, but, as I wuz tellin' ye before, I got my s'picions where it come from. But I don't tell Hank that yet, 'cause I hain't got much evidence.

'Bout a week after I'd see'd the doc and mailed his letter, we hears that the varmint has been prowlin' 'round the cemetery over there next the doc's house; leastways, that's what some o' the mounting folks says. 'Course this jest goes ter prove my argyment 'bout the varmint's bein' that critter of the doc's what come in the big wooden box, only it has got away, and is prowlin' 'round loose. 'Course it has got kinder used ter stayin' 'round the doc's place; so 'twuz only natteral fer it to be see'd there. In the meanwhile Hank, he's hung 'round my store most o' the time tryin' ter figger out what 'tis. He hain't been able ter find no tracks, bein's the wind has blowed the snow around in drifts on both nights the thing wuz supposed ter be prowlin' 'round.

Then the next night the widow what lives in that little cabin this side the doc's place see'd the critter's eyes peerin' in at her kitchen window. Nigh scared her to death; leastways, that's what she said afterward. But she goes one better'n any o' the men folks what's see'd it, fer the widow sets her big dog loose at the door, and then the wildest screechin' and yellin' lets loose that she gits plumb skeered, and takes down the big rifle what used ter belong ter her ole man 'fore he died with the fever, and then sets with it 'cross her knees.

She goes ter the door oncet right after the screechin', but though she called and whistled, the big dog don't come back. And he wuz shorely one powerful dog, too! The widow, she sets there till sunup next mornin', and then she see'd her dog out under the window, dead. The wind had blowed hard all night, and the snow had drifted 'round so's she couldn't see no tracks, but the whole side o' the dog wuz ripped open, showing whatever varmint killed him made powerful quick work o' it.

Well, that wuz jest the spark what set off the cannon—as my old grandpap used ter say—fer the new school marm, she won't hold school alone no more, and the mounting women refuse ter let the kids come ter school till the wild critter's killed off.

'Course there ain't nothin' else ter do but git the danged thing, only we ain't got no clews. Howsoever, Hank, he gits a half-a-dozen o' the young bucks and me ter go 'long with him and lay in wait fer the critter. I decide I better s'plain my argyment ter Hank, and I does so. After that we sets a guard all 'round the doc's house.

WELL, 'twuz a cold night, but we kept walkin' up and down like them sentinel-fellers in the army till we'd meet each other, and then we'd walk back agin. We hain't see'd nothin' fer several hours, when all to oncet Hank whistles like a screech owl. That's our signal 'f we see anything 'spicious-lookin'. We all begin ter head toward the place where Hank is stationed, but when we gits there, Hank's gone.

By this time all o' the rest o' us has gethered there, and Hank's disappearance looks sort o' funny ter us. Then all to oncet Hank whistles agin; leastways, we hear the owl's cry, and then before we git started we hear two or three more in different places. Now we can't figger out how Hank could be coverin' so much territory in so short a time, bein's there ain't no real screech owls there in the dead o' winter; so we finally sets out toward the last place we heerd the signal.

Well, when we gits there, why, Hank, he ain't no place ter be found. We don't know what ter do next, bein's we ain't able ter figger out why Hank don't wait fer us all ter ketch up with him, bein's them wuz our orders ter start with. Well, sir, we waited there 'neath a big old oak tree, and the wind, it wuz risin' and lacin' them branches over our heads till we decide maybe we couldn't hear Hank whistle if he wuz ter try it. 'Specially we thought this wuz the case bein's we ain't heerd from Hank now fer nigh onto a half-hour or so. We set our heads tergether and decide ter set out and hunt him.

But we ain't gone more'n ten rod or so till one o' the boys in front lets out a yell. Bein's I ain't so spry as the rest, I wuz bringin' up the rear; so 'course I don't know what 'tis brung that yell from our man. I hustles ter the front, howsoever, and there, layin' face down in the snow, is Hank.

Now, sir, we wuz that s'prised we didn't say nothin' fer a spell, but then I reaches down and rolls Hank over. There ain't much moon shinin' that night; so we had ter git down close ter see his face, but it ain't bloody 'tall. We feels 'round his coat ter see if there's any bullet hole or somethin' ter 'count fer his bein' dead. But we don't find no blood o' any sort; so we wuz plumb upset. His body's warm, howsoever; so we start ter pick him up. Then Hank begins ter come to, and he talks foolish-like fer a minute afore he gits his right senses.

"That wuz a turrible wallop!" he says, soon's he is in his right mind. We wuz all curious ter know what Hank

meant; so I says ter him, "Hank," says I, "what's wrong with ye, anyhow?"

Well, sir, he goes on ter tell us that he'd see'd them big yaller-green eyes what Jess Cooper wuz tellin' us about back there in my store several weeks before. Hank says he gives us the signal, and starts ter crawl up on the varmint. But danged if the critter didn't whistle back at Hank!

Hank says he don't believe it at first; so he whistles agin, but that varmint answers him. 'Course we all didn't know whether Hank has got back in his right senses or not, 'cause there's no critter what we ever see'd that could whistle. But then we 'gin ter rec'lect hearin' them signals comin' from different places almost at the same time; so we don't know but what Hank is in his right mind, after all.

Hank, he says he keeps crawlin' toward the place where he'd see'd the critter last, but he can't find them yaller eyes no more. He says he gits ter a big oak tree an' wuz standin' under it when all to oncet he hears the branches over his head begin ter crackle, and that's the last he knows till we find him.

Now Hank's story don't make us feel no better by no means, 'cause we 'gins ter think what a powerful queer varmint this thing is. Jess had told us it wuz higher'n his horse's back, an' now Hank, he tells us it whistled back at him, and then it must have lived in trees to boot; so we wuz holdin' our guns with our trigger fingers all ready ter shoot.

Well, sir, Hank, he ain't scarcely finished his story till one o' the boys calls out that he's see'd the yaller-eyed critter agin. We looks where he said it wuz, and shore 'nough, there 'twuz, 'bout a hundred yard or so from where we wuz standin'.

Now I ain't nervous—leastways, I hain't never thought I wuz—but I'll swear I didn't like the look o' them big yaller-green eyes starin' at me. We all didn't know but what it might be the devil hisself, and we 'gin ter expect it will be flyin' next; so I up and took a shot at it.

'Course my aim wuzn't so steady as it might o' been, fer I'm allus reckoned ter be a sure shot; leastways, I've won several prizes with my rifle, but I hit the critter, anyways, an' it let out one o' the wildest yells what ever wuz let loose in this here mounting country. I 'gin ter respect that pore widow woman's nerve more 'n more. But this here varmint, after my shot, yelled an' screeched till we thought all hell wuz turned loose.

Well, the critter took off through the trees, and now we had it on the run, why, we 'gin ter feel better. Leastways, we know it ain't after us no more; so we decides ter go after it. First o' all, it makes fer the graveyard over there next the doc's house, an' we're follerin' it fast as we kin. 'Course 'twuz hard ter see where it wuz goin', fer it wuz purty dark, but every oncet in a while one o' the boys up in front would spot them big yaller-green eyes, as the critter looked back ter see if we wuz still after it.

We didn't none o' us 'specially like goin' inter them gravestones at that time o' night with this here varmint prowlin' 'round, even though we wuz chasin' it, but we 'gin ter think o' the wimmen folks what might be killed by it; so we all start right in. I don't like ter be in the rear no more; leastways, not while we're among them shadowy tombstones; so I speed up a bit till I'm among the boys.

Hank, he leads the way now, and we chased the critter out o' the graveyard, and it starts on toward the doc's place. Oncet in a while it lets loose one o' them screeches what we heerd when I shot it. The boys lets go with their rifles now 'n agin, but they don't seem ter do no good; leastways, it keeps on ahead o' us.

We foller it clear to the doc's back door, an' then it stops for a spell. Well, Hank says ter spread out an' surround the house, an' we do. All the time, howsoever, the critter keeps prowlin' round the house in circles. It 'pears like we have got it at bay now, fer its glowin' eyes is plain an' they're turned toward us most o' the time. We decides ter yell fer the doc, 'cause we're 'fraid ter shoot fer fear we'd miss the varmint an' kill the doc inside. So we 'gin ter call fer the ole man ter watch out, an' not unlock his door. We tells him ter light a lamp, so's we kin see the outline o' the critter as it passes before one o' the windows, bein's we ain't never see'd it, only them big yaller-green eyes.

But the doc, he don't answer; so we yells louder 'n before, and one o' the boys, he up and shoots over the top o' the house, thinkin' maybe the doc is asleep. But still there ain't no answer from within.

We keeps on callin' an' agin one o' the boys shoots, but the doc, he never replies. The varmint, howsoever, lets out another one o' them screeches, and bumps agin the door o' the house.

WE can't figger out what's wrong with the doc, bein's he ain't deaf, and even a heavy sleeper couldn't help hearin' all our racket goin' on; so we decides maybe the old man is sick or somethin'. That critter keeps bumpin' agin the door, fer we kin hear the noise, an' so we 'gin ter feel that maybe it will git inside 'n kill the pore ole man 'fore we kin ketch it. 'Course we ain't none o' us fond o' goin' inside the door into the dark house if that varmint gits there ahead o' us; so we don't know what ter do.

Well, I walks off an' gits a side view where I kin take a shot without danger o' strikin' the house if I misses. I calls out ter the boys ter git away from the other side o' the house in case my aim ain't so good as it ought ter be, an' then I fire.

There is another shriek, though this one ain't so loud an' fierce as them others has been, an' then all is quiet. But I kin see that I've hit the critter purty bad, and it's fell down. Them eyes never moves an' they're down close ter the ground; so I takes good aim agin, and lets loose with my Winchester another time. But there ain't no screech no more; so I calls out, "Boys, I think I've got the critter fer sure."

We all wuz feelin' better ter think that this here mysterious varmint is dead, but I wants ter make certain; so I says, "Boys, look out! I'm goin' ter take another crack at that thing right 'tween them big yaller-green eyes," and I does. But they don't move no more, an' there's no sound comes from the beast.

Now I knows that I hain't been missin' all them times, 'cause, as I have said before, I ain't a bad shot nohow. Well, sir, Hank, he hunts 'round till he gits some brush afire, and we draw in toward the turrible varmint.

As we do so, them eyes, they looks worse'n they did in the dark, fer the fire glitters an' flashes green an' red in 'em, jest like a wildcat's what I shot oncet when I wuz younger an' out huntin' one time. But the critter is still ahead of us, an' as we draw nearer we kin see it stretchin' out black-like in the shadows, and it's nigh onto six feet long. Still them glitterin' eyes is never movin', but the flames o' the torch what Hank is carryin' make 'em sparkle like a big diamond what I see'd oncet.

When we gits up close ter the thing, well, sir, the boys let out a yell agin, an' I come nigh doin' so myself. We're s'prised an' skeered more'n ever.

There, stretched out on the doorstep is that blind boy what allus used ter come

down ter my store with the doc. An' what's worse, he ain't blind like we allus thought he wuz, but has big yaller-green eyes what are still open an flashin' an' glitterin' in the red fire o' Hank's torch. Well, sir, 'fore I kin git over the shock o' the first sight o' the boy, I see two bullet holes in the middle o' his forehead where I had shot him dead.

Now, sir, I ain't never killed a man before; so I wuz feelin' purty bad at that. Still, what kin I do? 'Twarn't my fault, bein's the thing ain't scarcely human, after all, with them big glitterin' green eyes. I kin tell ye we all never said a word fer a spell, an' then Hank, he breaks the silence:

"Danged 'f this hain't the queerest thing I ever see'd!"

I says, "Hank, ye don't think the Lord would hold me guilty o' this lad's blood, do ye?"

Hank, he says no, an' this makes me feel tolable better, but I ain't happy yit. Well, Hank, he says there's somethin' strange 'bout it all, bein's the boy shorely wuz blind when he come, or, leastways, we allus thought so, an' now he's got eyes, but they hain't human. The thing scares us more layin' there dead than it did when it wuz prowlin' 'round the tombstones screechin'.

We don't know what ter do next, but Hank—after seeing them eyes still starin' up at us—says we got ter see the doc an' have this thing cleared up. We pull the body out from the doorway, and go inside.

Hank, he wuz leadin' the way, an' the smoky firebrand what he wuz holdin' over his head made movin' shadows along the walls what wuzn't comfortable ter see. But Hank kept on, an' bein's none o' the rest o' us wanted ter be left alone on the outside with them glitterin' eyes, why we all follered Hank purty close. We went through the kitchen first, an' the boards wuz rotten an' sounded hollowlike in other places, an' we don't like it nohow. But we keeps on follerin' Hank till we gits into another room.

There's a big flat table inside here, an' it's got all sorts o' shiny steel instruments on it. Some o' 'em is polished like silver, an' some is sharp 'n thin 'n pointed. But that ain't all what's in that there room, fer there's one o' them pig-like critters what the doc brung with him when he first come ter town. He is layin' there part cut open with both legs on his right side gone. He is froze solid, howsoever, fer there ain't a mite o' heat in the house. After we git a good look at all these things, why we decides ter go on with our search fer the doc.

We starts into the next room, an' it's got a bed on the far side, an' there we finds the ole man. We see'd at once why he didn't come ter the door when we had called him. He wuz layin' there on the bed with nothin' over him, and all the meat on his right arm wuz either chewed or tore off, an' the skeleton o' the arm wuz hangin' from the side o' the bed onto the floor.

You could see the meat up 'round his shoulder, an' it made me think o' one o' my hams what I had down to the store, only I uses a sharp knife an' makes a smooth, clean cut, while this wuz uneven and stringy-like. 'Course this don't make us feel no better by no means, but it ain't all. His face was all cut up like somebody'd used one o' them sharp gleamin' knives, what we'd see'd layin' out there on the table in the other room, ter carve his name on the ole man's face, an' he wus a turrible sight ter behold.

WE had got 'bout more'n we had bargained fer in one night; so I up an' says that we all had better go home an' come back the next day. Hank, he's feelin' 'bout the same way hisself; so he turns 'round an' starts ter leave. But as we all git ter the door we see'd a writin' book on the little old dresser top, an' it is open.

Hank, he picks it up, an' then we goes out. Before we leaves fer good, howsoever, I says we ought ter put the body o' the lad inside the house, an' we does. 'Course it's so cold we knows it will be froze solid purty soon, anyway, inside the house or out, but I wuz feelin' like I'd ought ter do my Christian duty ter the boy, an' make up fer pluggin' them bullet holes in his forehead. An' then I didn't want no stray cats ter mutilate it any farther till we could git back next mornin'.

We wuz glad ter git away from there, howsoever, an' start home. But we didn't go ter bed after we got back, fer it wuz the middle o' the night; so I jest took the boys down ter the store, an' built up a fire, an' got 'em some cheese an' crackers. Then Hank, he pulls that there writin' book out o' his pocket an' hands it ter me, 'cause I've took some 'special lessons in readin' from our schoolmarm when she wuz boardin' at my place.

Well, sir, it 'peared ter be one o' these diaries where some folks puts down what they've done each day. I read it all ter the boys, an' we found that the doc had been writin' down 'bout some o' the 'speriments what he had made on his animules. But farther over he tells 'bout that there big critter what had them green eyes. I read it all ter Hank an' the boys, though some o' it we all don't 'gin ter know. Though I hain't never see'd some o' them long words before, I read it all jest as it wuz put down. I does my best, howsoever, an' starts at the beginnin':

"*November* 15. I am feeling highly elated with the success of my unusual experiment thus far, and have just written a letter to my eminent colleague at Vienna. After putting the sturdy young leopardess under the influence of the anaesthetic yesterday morning, I spent nearly an hour in the extremely delicate operation of removing her eyeballs without injuring in any way the optic tract of nerve fibers. I was compelled, of course, to sever the tract a short distance behind the retina, but made sure that I had enough left that I might use it in a very complex suture with that of the blind youth Rubini. I greatly deplore the fact that I have had to flee from the exquisitely equipped laboratories of the boy's eminent father, under whom I received the greater part of my surgical training, but then the latter did not treat me with the consideration due my genius. Knowing the nicety of my delicate operations, he should have permitted me to perform the transference on his son there before the eyes of experts, but he would not. It would have been all to his advantage, however, since I stole away in the night with the youth and have done it anyway.

"But I must continue in my exposition of this very difficult feat. After removing the eyes of the leopardess I quickly placed them in solution, while I commenced to take out the sightless eyeballs of Rubini, whom I had also placed under an anaesthetic. This task had to be performed with even greater exactitude, and I doubt if in all Europe a surgeon could be found who could have accomplished it.

"I stretched the optic nerves of the eyes over an inch by taking the eyeballs in my fingers, and then pulling them away from their sockets. I was very careful to fasten the optic tracts so that they could not slip back into the youth's skull after I had severed them. Such a calamity would have complicated the operation immensely. But I was highly successful throughout. Quickly I procured the eyes of the leopardess and made a very nice suture of the respective optic tracts. Very gently I released the taut optic nerves of the boy, and as they slipped back I placed the new eyeballs in his sockets. I encountered little difficulty in splicing the medial, the superior, and the lateral muscles of the eyeballs,

but had to be extremely careful in performing the compound suture of the inferior oblique recti.

"Immediately thereafter I securely bandaged the eyes, and awaited results.

"*November* 16. It is rather early yet to predict the outcome, although when I changed the bandages today, I noted that the sutures were healing rapidly. The youth is, of course, still under the influence of anaesthetics.

"I am very angry at Rubini's father, as I look back, because he did not permit me to perform the operation in his excellently equipped laboratory in Vienna. There I could have transferred human eyes belonging to some criminal sentenced to death, or else I might have taken out the eyes of a dying man who was in our hospital annex. However, I have been forced by fate to do otherwise, and I am looking forward with the greatest eagerness to the time when I shall see the light of human reason shining out from the transplanted eyeballs of the young leopardess. I console myself, too, by the thought that after I have thoroughly demonstrated my remarkable surgical feat, I can take out the youth's present eyes and replace them with others, probably human.

"*November* 22. For the first time I imagined that a glimmer of human intelligence shone out of those greenish orbs, but I have not yet taken off the bandages permanently.

"*November* 30. Nothing important has occurred in the interim. This afternoon, however, I removed the bandages, and permitted the youth to glance about the room. I am at a loss to account for his actions, however, for, though he appears docile enough as long as he is blindfolded, he becomes irascible as soon as he begins to *see*, and *he can see*.

"He walked around the room by himself, and touched several objects in a hesitating manner, but there was no uncertainty in his arm and eye co-ordinations after the first few minutes. But I could scarcely get the bandages back on. He grew almost fierce. I am aware of the normal predominance of the visual over the other senses in human life; so perhaps this explains his strange actions.

"*December* 3. Truly I must begin writing my article for the medical journal. Just as long as Rubini is blindfolded he is the same youth whom I brought here originally, but once the bandages are removed, he grows unmanageable. I am beginning to fear that the peculiar structure of the leopardess' eyes may be the cause of this. Could it be that, as long as he obtains impressions from the surrounding world by means of his native human sense organs he is submissive—that is, while he is blindfolded and uses touch and hearing—but that as soon as the visual factor appears, this sense dominates the others, and even colors his whole mental imagery? I must make a close study of the phenomenon. I shall, however, be compelled to give him narcotics in order to keep him under control meanwhile.

"*December* 5. A strange thing happened last night. I am almost trembling yet as I think of it in retrospect! About the middle of the night, for some unaccountable reason, I grew restless in my sleep, and, upon awakening, found two large yellow-green orbs glaring at me from just a few inches above my face. By the unexpectedness of the event I was terrified. Then in a moment I realized its significance, and called out sharply, 'Rubini! Rubini! Go to bed!'

"I fancied that I heard a low guttural sound, quite like a growl, but perhaps it was only my own overwrought nerves. I was obliged, however, to arise and by sheer physical force compel the strange youth to return to his cot. I must not forget this event; it will require a greater dose of medicine to keep him docile from now on.

"*December* 12. An unusual thing occurred this morning. While dissecting a guinea pig upon my rude operating table, I heard a soft footfall behind me, and whirling about, found myself face to face with Rubini. His eyes had a peculiar gleam—there is nothing human about them. I am unable to account for it, unless the end organs of the leopardess are strong enough to dominate the mental imagery which they produce. Truly it is strange!

"But Rubini gave one glance at the bloody animal which I had before me, and then, before I could prevent it, he seized the nerveless creature and with his teeth tore a strip of flesh from its side. Surely Rubini has not been underfed, for I have always offered him all that he seemed to care for; he has frequently even left part of his food untouched. Living things, however, may fascinate him. Yet the guinea pig was practically dead. Why did he take it? Since this weird affair brought the question to my attention, I have been wondering what could have become of the many rats with which this old dwelling was infested until a few days ago.

"*December* 17. I feel that I am losing all control over the youth. Would that his father could see him now! He is growing fierce and uncouth. But it serves his father right to have forced me to flee in this manner, and perform the operation without adequate facilities. I am, however, beginning to lose my ability to concentrate. I do not seem able to write that paper for the medical journal.

"I went to the store yesterday and purchased some food, and while there mailed a letter to my friend in Vienna, requesting him to describe my experiment upon Rubini to the youth's father. I am getting revenge for having been driven into this wilderness hole! But I find myself lapsing into periods of lethargy and forgetfulness. Last night I forgot to feed Rubini, and when I came to my senses, there he stood before me tearing a squirming, squealing rat with his teeth. Then he would leer at me in a weird sort of grin. I feel that way, too, sometimes.

"I am growing weaker and weaker, and have begun to take narcotics myself. Food does not seem to build up my strength. Rubini is getting beyond my control, and I do not know what to do. He was out of the house all last night, and this morning had a deep flesh wound in his left leg. I tried to bandage it, but he glared, and I am sure that he muttered something like a growl. How long he has been roving about the country I do not know. I wish that I could get him under control again so that I could take out those eyes once more from their sockets. Then I am sure that he would be docile again.

"*December* 28. Last night I awakened to find the greenish orbs again watching me intently from the darkness. I can not endure this much longer. I ordered him back to bed, but he would not heed me. In fact, he was quite refractory, and when I slapped him on the shoulder right soundly, he seized my arm, and sank his teeth into my wrist. Fortunately there was an open penknife within reach, and with this I drove him out of the room, and locked the door.

"*December* 29. I am almost afraid to venture out of my bedchamber in search of food. But hunger is driving me to do so; accordingly, I must be prepared. But what have I with which to defend myself? Only a small penknife! What a quirk of fate! The creation of my own surgical genius has turned upon me and awaits beyond the door. He has been prowling around ever since I drove him out of the room. But I must go; if not for food, at least for drink and perhaps neighboring help. I feel strangely a sense of foreboding. At any rate, though, I have proved my contention. I have drunk my cup of vengeance! Rubini! Rubini! I go forth to meet you once more!"

(*Continued on page* 82)

A Weird Novelette of Devil Worship in Yucatan

THE COBRA LILY

By LEDYARD M. BAILEY

THE veranda of the Country Club commanded a wide sweep of rolling wooded hills and neatly cropped fields, of twinkling water and gleaming sails. As Henry Adams Oakes paused in the doorway he thought it had never looked so lovely. A sharp tussle at tennis, handily won, a shower and as near a drink as the House Rules allowed had left him in a peaceful and receptive frame of mind.

The prospect seemed ill-fitted to treason, stratagems and spoils, but his eye turning to the nearer scene he discovered, at a table in the choicest corner of the veranda, "The Triple Alliance"—three maids fair to look upon, whose smiles belied their sinister reputation in the matter of male heart-strings. His mother, with the primitive instinct for protecting her off-spring, was wont to remark that what made them dangerous was their practice of hunting in a pack, so that the quarry had less than a Chinaman's chance for his life. Mr. Oakes, however, did not content himself with sniffing the battle from afar, but promptly went over the top in an attempt to break their line.

Welcomed wih the zest due to their lawful prey, he deftly conveyed the idea that he had room for one passenger in his runabout, and would be charmed if they would detail one of their number to fill it. And, to forestall any prolonged debate and heartburnings, he suggested that they match coins to determine the winner. He said "winner" also "heartburnings," by way of a preliminary bombardment, to break the enemy's morale.

In any contest of mere wits he must have been hopelessly outclassed, but much practice in training camp and dug-out had given him a certain manual dexterity and speed which the ladies lacked. Once again he proved that the hand is quicker than the eye. Thus he made sure of Margaret Winthrop for his passenger, though it was quite

clear that neither of the other members of the Alliance had so intended.

Driving homeward in the pleasant coolness of sunset dusk, he found even more charm and ease for the eye in the seat beside him, and paid but casual attention to the road. So he was quite off guard when, as he slowed for a trolley crossing, a man stepped from the roadside bushes to his running board, stuck an unpleasant-looking automatic in his face, and ordered him to drive slow and stop under the first tree. Margaret caught her breath on a sharp exclamation of dismay and was gruffly told to "shut her trap!"—a remark which failed to please Mr. Oakes' nice sense of the courtesy due a lady.

Barring a change of expression which to his friends, would have signaled danger, he gave no apparent heed to anything but his car, and kept both hands on the wheel, but his left elbow suddenly flicked up and caught the man full on the point of his out-thrust jaw. It was a short arm jolt of the deadliest sort, and the footpad flopped to the pavement with an abandon which showed a total loss of interest in the proceedings.

Oakes, on the contrary, went into action on the instant, stopping the car, jerking open the door and stepping to the ground all in one motion. Running back to the senseless man, he dragged him out of the roadway, tossed his gun over the fence, and then bent over him for a moment, his hands moving swiftly, with a gleam of steel.

Margaret, twisted round in her seat, watched in round-eyed anxiety until he rejoined her, but as he put the car in motion she burst out, "what in the world were you doing to him?"

"Merely cut his suspenders and shoelaces," he answered coolly; "a little trick we learned in France. Takes all the fight out of 'em."

Margaret received this information with a gasp and then a burst of laughter so heartfelt that tears stood in her eyes, and Henry Adams was moved to pat her hand approvingly.

"Oh, dear!" she stammered at last, "who but you could have thought of that!"

As the car passed out of sight the footpad roused and sat up, feeling his chin with cautious fingers. Then, getting to his feet, he discovered his unfitness for either fight or flight, and, holding himself together, he shuffled back toward the trolley, cursing the vanishing car with marked sincerity and thoroughness.

IN THE car, Mr. Oakes abruptly cut across Margaret's final chuckle over his exploit.

"Peggy," he said, "I am going to Yucatan next week."

Margaret caught her breath again. For a drive which had begun so casually, this one seemed to have more than its share of thrills.

"Yucatan!" she said, rather faintly. "Just like that!"

Then, recovering herself, she went on: "Yucatan! And why Yucatan? Chewing gum?—or bananas?"

"Blossoms," said Henry Adams; "and cactus,—and chiggers."

Margaret made a shuddering face. "And raving mosquitoes," she added, "and man-eating ants—and crocodiles! And lovely Senoritas, with wonderful eyes and unspeakable tempers!"

It was Henry Adams' turn to chuckle. "Peggy," he said, "you move fast!"

She became suddenly serious. "Uncle Bob spent five years down in those parts," she said. "Horrible country! Are you really going?"

"I wrote to the Director of the Smithsonian ten days ago," said Oakes. "Offered to take an expedition into the back country at my own expense, provided the Government would guarantee passports and protection. I think he will take me up."

Margaret studied him for a long minute. It had been her habit since High School days to be rather fond of Henry Adams Oakes, III,—only son and worthy scion of an old Back Bay family. She knew of the stern purpose and industry with which he pursued his chosen vocation of tropical botany—so successfully that he had won recognition in high quarters before he was twenty-eight. And she knew why they had called him "Live" Oakes in Harvard, and later in the American Expeditionary Forces. He had a sort of gay recklessness and careless courage which had flowered oddly from the staid old Puritan stock. That Huguenot great-grandmother was responsible, probably. If he had made up his mind to go to Yucatan, he would go. And she had rather counted on him in certain plans for her winter at home. She heaved a little sigh.

"Some queer ruins in Yucatan, too," she said. "Older than the Aztecs."

Oakes looked at her. "How did you come to think of that?" he said. "That is one of the best reasons for going. Ruins are not in my line, exactly, but these certainly are all you say—queer! I have some photographs—temples, altars, great courtyards, curious and intricate carvings done by skilled artisans—and all forgotten in the jungles centuries before ever Cortez found the Aztecs. I would like to know who made them, and why."

They had drawn up at Margaret's door before the talk ran out. They sat silent for a little. Then Margaret rose and stepped to the curb.

"Bring me back an altar, or something," she said lightly. "Thank you for the ride—and I shall never forget that poor abused hold-up man! Shall I see you before you go?"

"I hope so," said Oakes, lifting his cap: "but about that altar, now. Would it be any use—to me?"

"One never can tell," smiled Margaret displaying a deadly dimple: "If you cannot lead the lady to the altar, try fetching the altar to the lady. It will be a change of program, at least. And you know I love novelty."

And so left him, out-guessed as usual.

THE next morning Mrs. Oakes found her son rather more unsocial than is common even for the before-breakfast male, but with the calm assurance of motherhood she persisted in brightening his morning sunshine with coffee and conversation until the maid handed in a telegram. Then things began to happen.

One glance at the yellow sheet, and Henry Adams kicked away his chair, caught his mother and whirled her about the room in a jazz dance that left her breathless with laughter and protest. The Director of the Smithsonian had answered at last.

There followed days and nights of crowded preparations, and presently Oakes was waving the last good-byes from the rail of his steamer across that strip of dirty harbor water that widens so slowly, and yet so surely and finally. And as always, when men go down to the sea for their light-hearted daring of unknown perils, there were women's hearts faint with forebodings behind the brave smiles and misty eyes. Mrs. Oakes and Margaret Winthrop were very close in spirit as well as in body as they drove up town from the docks.

At dinner the first night out, Oakes was renewing an old troop-transport acquaintance with the smartly-uniformed Captain, when he became aware of a sudden lack of attention and found the keen, sun-wrinkled eyes fixed on something behind him, while the table chatter about them paused for a moment. Turning his head, he beheld a vision of tropical beauty in a bewildering Paris dinner gown, poised on the lowest step of the dining saloon stairway.

Waiting long enough to make sure that all eyes were upon her, the vision came pacing down the broad strip of carpet, straight to the Captain's table. As a dramatic entrance, it was a riot! The Captain came to his feet and Oakes rose with him, to be presented to Senorita Amalia de Quintana, who acknowledged the introduction with a blinding smile and accepted the chair at the Captain's right hand.

It seemed that the lady had looked over the list of eligibles and prepared her campaign, for she wasted no time on a survey of the other diners, but forthwith centered her fire on Mr. Oakes. It cannot be said that he offered a stubborn resistance. He was in love, as he acknowledged to himself, with Margaret Winthrop—ashore; but afloat was another story. He was an excellent sailor, the last of the shore lights were drowned astern, and there was a perfectly good moon.

As a steamer affinity, the Senorita left nothing to be desired—olive skin, black as to hair and glorious eyes, lithe and rounded of figure and always fetchingly turned out, she was good to look upon; and her tireless vivacity and gay chatter in Spanish, French and English, which she seemed to use with equal facility, her dancing and her delicious contralto voice made a quite irresistible ensemble.

She knew Paris better than Oakes himself, and was but newly returned from thence and on her way to visit her adored family at their ancient estate near Merida, in Yucatan. She was enchanted to learn that Senor Oakes was to visit her dear Yucatan, and he should not return until he had paid her a visit in her home, where he would find many rare plants to interest him—and perhaps other things.

Swinging about the promenade deck for morning exercise, leaning on the rail to watch the flying fish skitter from wave to wave, lounging in deck chairs under the after awnings, dancing, playing cards in the smoking-room, watching the milky gleam of the wake in the moonlight—it was a merry life and a short one, which was well perhaps for their future peace of mind.

One evening, renewing her fervid interest in his expedition, she demanded his note-book and pencil and drew for him a sketch of a strange plant, with thick sprawling leaves and a single tall, slender stalk, crowned with a heavy conical bud poised like the head of a serpent.

This, she told him, was the Serpent Flower of the Maya Indians, whose touch was death, and which played a part in the weird and awful ceremonies attendant upon the worship of the Serpent God, still kept up in the ancient ruined temples, buried in the jungle. Her description was so vivid that Oakes was impressed in spite of his scientific skepticism; but when — pressed for further details—she declared that she had never seen the plant herself but was merely quoting her old Indian servants, he lost interest.

The night before landing was, by custom, set apart for the Captain's Ball, and the passengers appeared in such more or less elaborate fancy dress as they could improvise. The Senorita was the hit of the evening, in a costume as striking and exotic as herself—a curiously designed and decorated native dress, with a head-piece of flaring colors which somehow reminded Oakes of one of his cactus blossoms. Her dancing was superb and her partners many and eager.

As the evening drew to its close, flushed with success and excited by compliments, she conferred a moment with the leader of the orchestra, and presently the music paused and the 'cello and piano took up a strange, rhythmic beat of tom toms. The Senorita cleared a space about her and swung into a barbaric ceremonial dance, swaying and posturing to some imagined deity—so realistic and savage that some of her fellow passengers shivered even in the midst of their noisy applause. Smiling her acknowledgments, she excused herself from further dancing, and, taking Oakes' arm, led him to a shadowy corner of the deck for her farewells.

It was fortunate that Margaret Winthrop was no psychic, or she might have had a most disturbing vision of that shadowy corner. The Senorita made no secret of her infatuation, and Henry Adams was no Saint Anthony.

THE next morning the steamer lay at her dock, and the Senorita was welcomed by her brother, a grave, handsome young gentleman of the same tropical complexion, and faultlessly turned out in a morning suit of the latest London cut. He led the way to a glittering French limousine, while the *mozos* looked after her mountain of luggage. Oakes, occupied with the details of getting his equipment off the ship, could only wave good-bye from the rail.

In the limousine, the Senorita immediately laid before her brother a proposal to which he listened in amazement and disgust, being nothing less than that he engage himself to Oakes as guide and headman for his expedition, thus insuring not only his safety but the certainty that he would pay the promised visit to her home. Overruling his objections with an odd mixture of pleading and authority, she finally carried her point, putting him at the same time under pledge of secrecy as to his relationship to herself.

Thus it came about that there presented himself to Oakes at his hotel, one Benito Alvear, an uncommonly good-looking and intelligent native, who offered his services as guide and headman for the journey he understood Senor Oakes intended to make. He answered all questions satisfactorily, his references were of the best, and Oakes engaged him on the spot, much relieved to find so good a man, and suspecting nothing of the Senorita's little scheme.

Leaving the city with a mule train, on the second day out they embarked in a long native boat, with six Indians at the paddles, the baggage piled amidships, Benito standing in the prow and Oakes sitting in the stern, and made good progress up a sluggish, muddy river into the thickening fringes of the jungle.

Late that afternoon, as they rounded a bend in the stream, they struck, head on, a sunken log hidden under the muddy water, and Benito was thrown overboard. At the splash two huge crocodiles, sunning themselves on the bank, were galvanized into sudden action, and came boiling through the water to seize him.

He came up alongside, swimming frantically, the Indians screaming and beating the water with their paddles, and Oakes, leaning far out, caught him by the hair with one hand, emptied his automatic into the crocodiles, and dragged him in over the stern just in time.

The man got to his knees, his chest heaving and his eyes wide with terror, and watched for a moment the wounded reptiles thrashing and rolling in a smother of foam. Then he turned upon Oakes a long look full of strangely mingled emotions, muttered, *"Muchissimas gracias, Senor!"* made his way forward between the frightened peons, restored discipline with a harsh word or two, and got the boat under way again.

That evening they made camp on a strip of sandy bar laid down by the floods, and which the jungle had not had time to conquer. As Oakes sat before his tent, fighting off the clouds of insects with his pipe, and watching the river mists slowly dim the huge stars, Benito came out of the shadows and, to his vast surprise, suddenly knelt at his feet and in a voice vibrating with feel-

ing placed at his service the life he had saved.

Amazed and touched, Oakes refused to accept the offer, making light of his part in the adventure; but Benito was not to be dissuaded, declaring that he must be bound by the ancient law of his own people, the Mayas, and that thenceforward his life was at his master's disposal.

Impressed in spite of himself by the man's evident sincerity, made the more convincing by the setting of the dim, unknown river and the black, silent, listening jungle, Oakes at last accepted the situation, reflecting that the matter would right itself when he presently returned to civilization.

Three days later they left the boat, carefully concealed in the mouth of a little creek that tunneled the rank jungle growth, and working slowly and painfully to higher ground, made permanent camp on a swelling mountain spur, where they found an open space with grass and a spring of clear water.

Here Oakes set to work, collecting, sketching, photographing and analysing the plants and flowers, and entering the data in his note-books. Thus, presently, he came upon the Senorita's sketch and, smiling at the memories it called up, summoned Benito to look at it, asking if he had ever seen or heard of such a plant.

As the man leaned over the camp table, Oakes heard him catch his breath and felt him stiffen with shock, and, looking up, found him staring at the sketch and trembling with excitement and terror. He demanded to know where Oakes had secured it, and, being told, broke into a torrent of words strange to Oakes' ears, but which he readily assumed to be savage and heartfelt curses.

Astonished at the outbreak and beginning to think there might be some truth in the Senorita's fantastic yarn, he faced Benito sternly and demanded to be shown this wonderful plant.

The man refused with vehement protests and denials of any direct knowledge of its whereabouts, but, studying him keenly, Oakes at once decided he was lying, and, his curiosity now fully aroused, made up his mind to push the matter to an issue.

Waiting for the gust of passion to pass, he reminded Benito of his oath of service and demanded its fulfillment. At this there followed a poignant struggle between terror and loyalty which left the Indian shaken, but in the end submissive.

"It is Death, Senor!" he protested; "death not only to me but to yourself, and to every man of us."

But when Oakes coolly waved aside this direful threat, he accepted his fate with a gesture of true Indian fatalism and agreed to do what he could.

AS dusk fell he brought to Oakes' tent an Indian costume and the juice of a nut, wherewith he stained his skin a light brown. Then, with strict injunctions as to silence and caution, he led the way into the jungle, avoiding the occasional faint trails, and at the end of an hour of breathless and noiseless travel they came suddenly face to face with a wall of great hewn stones, overrun with creepers and looming overhead.

Along this Benito slipped for a few yards to a crevice where one of the stones had fallen partially away, and into this he pushed Oakes and crouched beside him. Still with infinite caution, he pulled away a tangle of vines and a small loose stone, and Oakes found himself staring through a chink in the wall into a courtyard, dimly lighted by flaring torches.

The walls were ornamented by carvings in high relief, and directly before him was a great circular stone altar and in front of it a stone vase, both carved in the strange symbols which he had noted in the photographs, which seemed to writhe and coil in the flickering torchlight.

And in the vase was the Serpent Flower, its thick leaves sprawling over the rim and the single tall stalk, with its sinister snaky head, swaying gently to and fro.

Oakes stared fascinated at this vision, his pulses for once in his life pounding heavily and his breath caught with something of Benito's quivering terror of impending evil. The flower stalk seemed incredibily instinct with life, and so serpent-like that Oakes recalled instantly the wicked, poised, fighting posture of the great king cobra of East India.

"The Cobra!" he breathed. "The Cobra Lily!" and scientific interest and curiosity began to slacken his taut nerves.

He had time to note that the *motif* of all the carvings was the same, an endless variety of grotesque serpent heads and coils, and that a crowd of Indian worshippers was dimly revealed by the flickering torches.

Then came the muffled beat of tom toms, the crowd stirred and their eyes gleamed as they turned to the entrance, and a procession paced slowly into view—priests, in elaborate and beautiful regalia, leading a young boy, blindfolded and naked; a High Priestess in a costume vaguely familiar, guards and torch-bearers.

The priests led the boy to the altar, the tom toms were hushed, and in silence the victim was laid flat on the altar, his feet toward the serpent flower, and bound securely by thongs passed through holes in the stone.

The silence, the deadly, sinister deliberation of the priests, the gleaming eyes of the worshippers, motionless and intent, the shifting flicker of the torchlight, now flaring up to throw everything into clear relief, now sinking to a dimness full of unseen terrors—all this plucked at Oakes' nerves until he had to clamp his self-control with both hands.

Benito beside him, tense with dread, breathed in his ear "Quiet, Senor, for your life!" Even the victim made no outcry, then nor later.

Then the tom toms boomed again, the priests fell back, and the Priestess sprang into a wild ceremonial dance before the altar. Again there seemed something familiar in the dancing and the odd rhythm of the drums, and suddenly, as the dancer swayed backward with the light of the torches full on her face, Oakes, with a shock of amazement, recognized his beautiful friend, the Senorita!

The tom toms boomed in quickening rhythm and the Priestess danced, posturing and gesturing before the altar and the Serpent Flower. And the altar slowly moved, tilting smoothly on a hidden pivot, until the boy hung upright, his naked breast level with the cobra head, which swayed more and more, turning with a deadly purpose toward the altar as the sunflower turns to the sun.

The Priestess flung out her arms in a gesture of fierce appeal, the tom toms thundered and the swaying stem swung in a wider and wider arc, until suddenly the pointed serpent head met the naked breast of the victim. There sounded a puffing *hiss*, like some huge serpent, and it seemed to Oakes, watching with all his eyes, that something flicked from the wicked head of the flower. But on the instant the boy gasped, straining convulsed against his bonds, and shuddering from head to foot. Then his chin dropped to his chest and he hung limp.

The Priestess and the worshippers fell to their knees and faces, the torches were sharply extinguished, and Oakes found himself staring into black darkness, shaken and amazed.

Benito's hand closed on his arm, and they crept out of their crevice. The man was shivering from head to foot like a

frightened horse, but he led the way again through the black and stifling jungle, and they made their way back to camp with no alarms.

IN the morning sunshine, Oakes said to himself that such things could not be, and concluded that he had witnessed some clever trick of mesmerism such as the Hindu fakirs use. Also, he realized that in this strange plant he had perhaps made a discovery of the first importance from a botanical point of view, and he determined at all hazards to secure it for careful observation and analysis.

Benito, relieved for the moment from his fears, had gone about his daily routine in a stoical calm that gave no hint of any smouldering resentment; but when Oakes summoned him and announced his purpose, there ensued another outburst of passionate protest and pleading even more intense than yesterday's. Oakes, however, held coolly and steadily to his determination, and made merciless use of the power of life and death which the Indian's oath of service had placed in his hands.

And in the end the man submitted again, going about his preparations with the detached air of one under the shadow of death. At his insistence, Oakes broke camp and sent the bearers with all the baggage back to the boat to await his coming. Then he prepared a box slung between poles to receive the plant, and an hour before sunset followed Benito again through the jungle to the temple court.

In the light of day there were few traces of the night's ceremonies, but he noted the ashes and smudge of suddenly smothered torches, and on the altar a single smear of blood. The plant was in its vase, but the tall stalk had withered and fallen. Oakes examined it with caution. Benito at his side glancing about in an agony of apprehension and urging him to haste.

He saw at once that the flower stalk had been cut off close to its base, with a sharp, clean cut; and that the stem was hollow. But Benito's growing terror would not admit further delay. They removed the plant with its roots and soil from the vase and packed it in the box, and, carrying it between them, made what speed they could through the night and the jungle toward the boat.

As they paused for a moment's breathing space after hours of punishing toil, a sudden clamor of drums broke out far behind them, and then the deeper booming of what Oakes recognized as a signal drum. At the sound Benito became frantic, and urged him to leave the box and run for life and he had to exert all his authority, backed by ferocious threats, to steady the man.

Just at dawn they reached the boat, and heard the signal drums answering from ahead and up the river. Once in the boat and out in the main stream, Benito recovered his courage and ably seconded Oakes in driving the rowers to their utmost.

Day and night they swept down stream, with never a stop for rest or food, the drums behind them spurring their weariness to fresh energy. And so on the second morning, as they swung round a long bend, Oakes' heart leaped exultantly at sight of the open sea, and of a small steamer moving down the coast. But Benito pointed ahead to puffs of smoke rising from the headland, and shouted a warning of ambush and the treachery of the crew.

Without an instant's hesitation, Oakes whipped out his automatic, forced his Indians one after the other to jump overboard and swim for shore, and he and Benito paddled the boat past the point, and out to sea. The steamer, a dirty little coastwise tramp, stopped at their signals, and after some parley they were picked up and found themselves in safety.

It seemed that the Serpent God had missed his stroke.

That night the temple court was lighted again and a conclave of priests gathered round the desecrated altar and the empty vase.

A litter, borne by runners panting with exhaustion, swept into the entrance and the Priestess joined the council, her glorious eyes blazing with fury as she saw the ravished vase and realized that her lover had at one stroke flouted both her God and her own passionate infatuation. A brief and stormy debate followed, and then, kneeling before the altar, the Priestess, at her own demand, took the oath to avenge the sacrilege and to bring back the Serpent Flower to its vase.

ON the fruit steamer to which the tramp presently transferred them, Oakes and Benito kept much to themselves. Out of sight of land, Benito's jungle terrors faded away, and Oakes found him for the most part an agreeable and interesting companion. He had traveled in Europe, and spoke good French and rather doubtful English. On some phases of the politics and resources of the Central American countries, he was a well-informed and entertaining talker. Oakes was more and more puzzled to reconcile the man's intelligence and breeding with his devotion to the horrible devil worship of his people.

Of two subjects, however, he never spoke. One was the strange relationship between Oakes and himself which his oath of service had established—which he never mentioned and never forgot. The other was the Serpent Flower and its worship. All questions and surmises as to this were met by a stubborn silence, which Oakes found no means of breaking down save by an appeal to the compulsion of the oath—and this he had promised himself never to use again.

Oakes made no attempt to examine the plant on shipboard, and contented himself with protecting it as thoroughly as possible against the increasing coolness of the Northern seas. But he spent hours going over in his mind the horrid details of the sacrifice and the weird behavior of the plant itself.

He might, as a botanist, grant to a plant the power of what seemed like intelligent motion. Several species had it in some degree—the *Dionaea,* "Venus' Fly Trap," for example. And he was not prepared to deny that such a plant might distill at the tip of its flower bud a deadly alkaloid poison. The poor boy had seemed to be stricken with sudden death at its touch. But this horrible thing had been altogether too intelligent—too nicely attuned to the rhythm of the tom toms and the incantations of the priestess. And then that *hiss!* He had certainly heard it. Decidedly, he could not admit that any plant could hiss as well as strike. And yet he certainly saw it and heard it.

And if the priests had no inkling of his presence, hidden in his cranny of the wall, it was not likely he had been hypnotized. He cursed Benito's panic, which had hurried them away before he had any chance to study out a solution which a man might entertain outside of a lunatic asylum.

Arriving in Boston, Oakes' first concern was to remove the Cobra Lily from its box and as closely as might be to restore it to its native conditions—setting it in rich soil in a vase of artificial stone, and placing it in a corner of the conservatory where it could be at once protected and isolated by a waist-high railing. The flower stalk and bud were withered, and these he carefully removed for examination; but the roots and leaves seemed still full of life.

Benito assisted in looking after the plant, without apparent reluctance or anxiety. He accepted also the comforts and conventions of civilization with a readiness that added to Oakes' puzzlement, and fitted into his place as valet

and confidential man so smoothly that it was hard to recall him in the savage setting from which they had so lately emerged.

Mrs. Oakes had welcomed her wanderer with the eager warmth of mother love, tempered by anxiety over the hardships and dangers she divined he had met. For his part, he made light of these, recounting his adventures with a casual and humorous touch, but his mother was not to be deceived, though she had long since learned the folly of trying to coddle her strong-winged offspring.

Freed for the moment from further concern for his jungle treasure, Oakes telephoned to Margaret Winthrop and was filled with deep delight at the eager thrill of welcome in her voice and the readiness with which she canceled an engagement in order to be at home to him.

He found her in her own softly-lighted library with its friendly little fireplace all aglow, and she gave him both her hands in welcome, smiling at first. Then, as she noted the traces of strain and weariness in his face, her eyes grew misty and her smile quivered. And at that his hungry heart could no longer be denied and he swept her into his arms.

Presently she made him sit beside her in front of the fire, and listened to his Odyssey—which he recounted fairly enough, beginning with the part played by the Senorita as Circe. Margaret winced a bit at this, but was reassured and breathlessly absorbed by the scene in the temple, where Circe had ceased to be alluring, and had changed into a savage devotee of horrible devil worship.

"And so," he finished, "I didn't bring the altar to the lady, after all. There seemed to be no time for it."

"Oh, my dear!" breathed Margaret, "I cannot laugh about it even now—those fiends would have butchered you without mercy."

"Benito seemed to be sure of it," he answered; "but I do wish I knew how the devils worked their mummery with that plant." Then, after a moment: "Suppose we go back there on our honeymoon, and find out? The lady to the altar, after all?"

But his description had been too vivid. Margaret shivered at the mere idea.

"The altar in Saint George's is quite good enough for me," she said. "Scientific curiosity is all very well, but entirely out of place on a honeymoon."

After which they lost interest in the ancient rites of the Mayas—turning to the worship of a little god quite as ancient but much more agreeable.

NEXT day Oakes made a careful physical and chemical analysis of the dried bud of the Lily, and concluded that the keen-pointed outer petals carried slight traces af an alkaloid poison, which, however, he could not identify and which seemed to do no harm to the confiding guinea pig into whose system he injected a part of the solution.

He was therefore forced to reserve his opinion, in his report to the Smithsonian, and waited impatiently for his strange find to become reconciled to its new home, and to send up another flower stalk.

A few days later, at breakfast with his mother, he opened a very correct envelope addressed in a dashing deminine hand and found a cordial note from no less a personage than Amalia de Quintana herself, informing Mr. Oakes that she had come to Boston for a few weeks in the Conservatory of Music, and anticipated the pleasure of a renewal of their "too brief acquaintance."

Danger and intrigue breathed from this innocent missive, and Henry Adams sniffed them with joy—there was no excitement in too easy a victory. But when, a little later, he showed the note to Benito, he was startled at the effect. It served to bring back at a breath all his jungle terrors, and he pleaded passionately with Oakes to destroy all traces of the plant, and to leave Boston until the Senorita had returned to Yucatan.

Wholly in the dark as to any other relationship between them than that of priestess and devotee, Oakes sought to laugh the man out of his fears, pointing out that this was Boston—not Yucatan; but he failed to respond, finally taking refuge again in his stolid fatalism.

An hour later, passing into the conservatory for his daily inspection, Oakes found Benito standing before the Cobra Lily, staring at it with a sort of gloomy horror quite out of keeping with the placid manner he had lately worn. At Oakes' approach, he turned away without a word. The plant was flourishing now, and a new flower stalk was shooting up from its center. Oakes was pleased with its progress. Things were beginning to happen. The solution of the mystery could not be much longer delayed.

That afternoon he called on the Senorita at her apartment and was received with enthusiasm. She was once more the vivid and alluring mondaine, quite at home in all the settings of luxury and culture, and with never a hint of barbarous superstition about her. She sought at once to re-establish their friendship on its former footing, but, finding Oakes slow to respond, she moderated her ardor, studying him keenly but maintaining her pose of cordial liking.

When he had taken leave, however, she promptly concluded that he was more interested in some other woman, and, adding to her motives for vengeance a flaming jealousy, she set herself to perfecting her campaign—utterly unconscious that Oakes had witnessed the scene in the temple and identified her as the Priestess.

At tea with Margaret, Oakes showed her the Senorita's note and quieted her uneasiness at its implications by suggesting that they give a musicale for her at his home, and thus, as he put it, break the news to her gently. The project was characteristic of his recklessness and liking for direct action, and he counted upon thus bringing to the surface whatever secret and dangerous intrigue she might be plotting.

Accordingly, the Senorita was much charmed next morning by a box of roses with Senor Oakes' card and a polite note, asking to bring his mother to call, and offering to arrange a musicale for her, to permit their friends to share his own admiration for her voice. Nothing could have been more flattering to her slightly bruised complacency, or more exactly fitted to forward her plan for a secret and sudden vengeance, and she promptly accepted.

And the Serpent Flower, as if aware that its Priestess was at hand, thrust up its tall stalk and venomous head, and began again that gentle, poised swaying to and fro. Oakes, watching it with a mixture of scientific interest and uncomfortable fascination, was joined again by Benito, who noted its condition with open horror and renewed his plea that it should be destroyed forthwith. Nothing was further from Oakes' mind, and he tried to shame him out of his fears, at the same time warning him sternly not to interfere, whatever might happen.

AT the musicale, Mrs. Oakes and Margaret received the guests and welcomed the Senorita, most attractively gowned and mannered, and seeming thoroughly at home in such an atmosphere.

The men, as usual, were much taken with her looks and her gay chatter; but she was careful to meet the women also with an engaging warmth and appeal which gave Oakes to wonder afresh at her histrionic talent. She studied the situation warily in the midst of her gayety, and promptly decided that Margaret was the rival for whom her own advances had been flouted—marking her

accordingly to share in the vengeance of the Serpent God.

Before the music, Oakes conducted a party of his guests, including the Senorita and Margaret, through his conservatory and showed them some of his treasures. Coming at length to the serpent flower, he drew their attention to it as his latest and most unique discovery.

"The Cobra Lily, only living specimen now in captivity! Hands off, if you please!"

Watching the Senorita, he caught the flare of savage fury in her eyes at this flippant sacrilege, and felt his own nerves thrill with the coming conflict of wits and courage. She turned to him composedly, however, and congratulated him upon securing a speciment of so rare a plant, which she herself "knew only by description and had never seen."

She acquitted herself with great credit of her part in the music, and afterward in the dancing, which Oakes had arranged as a fitting close for the evening. Her partners were full of enthusiasm over her grace and her mastery of all the new steps, and she enjoyed their compliments with a light-hearted air which forbade any suspicion of the seething rage and hate beneath her lovely rounded bosom.

Oakes had one glimpse of Benito's face in the recess back of the music, and was struck by the tragic misery in his eyes as he watched her. Evidently the man was filled with dread of some horrible *denouement*.

Presently Oakes claimed another dance with his guest of honor, and as they passed the musicians he signaled the leader, and once again the dance music paused, and the 'cello sounded the vibrant throbbing of tom toms, while he whispered, holding her eyes with his own, "Doesn't that remind you of the Real Thing?" and smiled wickedly.

Her eyes flared and she brushed away his hands, but she managed to control her features, and pleading some trifling accident to her costume, excused herself and slipped away to the dressing-room.

Here she was free to throw off constraint for a moment and to give rein to her fury and to the bewilderment of the sudden suspicion that her secret was out.

"He knows!" she muttered, "and he laughs! He *laughs! at me!*" And her desperate purpose hardened for an immediate reprisal.

Returning to the guests, who were beginning to take their leave, she sought out Margaret and begged her to accompany her to the conservatory for a moment, to help her find an ornament she must have dropped there—and so led her directly to the Serpent Flower, now poised once more for its stroke.

Oakes, missing them, followed headlong, shouting a warning, and at this the Senorita dropped all pretense, and seizing Margaret sought to thrust her into contact with the venomous head. The American girl, utterly bewildered by the sudden savagery of the attack, nevertheless twisted her body sharply aside and, trying to break the clutch of the fury's arms, bent her backward over the railing for a brief instant—and the swaying serpent head touched the Senorita's bare shoulder.

As Oakes reached them she released Margaret and clung a moment to the rail, glaring at the flower, her face a mask of horror and shudders rippling over her body; then her knees gave way and she sank to the floor at their feet.

While Margaret and Oakes still stood together, staring horrified at the huddled body, Benito ran in and threw himself down beside it, sobbing out, "*Dios mio, Senor!* She is my sister!"

Oakes, cursing his own recklessness and trembling at Margaret's narrow escape, held her until she had recovered herself, then, sending her to warn his mother and dismiss the guests, he helped Benito raise his sister and carry her to a couch in the laboratory.

She lived, but pulse and breathing were barely perceptible, and the hastily summoned physician found his stimulants of no slightest effect, nor could he discover any mark of injury save a tiny, reddened spot on the smooth skin of her shoulder.

Mrs. Oakes and Margaret got her to bed and a nurse was installed, but Benito, with a somber, wordless obstinacy, refused to leave her side for a moment. The doctor studied her carefully and reported to Oakes that he could make nothing of her condition beyond shock and profound coma, with no trace of any known poison or other definite cause. He could advise nothing for the time being, further than absolute quiet and ceaseless vigilance.

In the morning Oakes found Benito still crouched by the bedside, his eyes fixed upon his sister's calm and lovely face. The nurse whispered that he had scarcely changed position all night long. She had nothing to report on her patient's condition—her heart beat faintly and she breathed lightly, but there were no other signs of life.

With much difficulty Oakes persuaded Benito to leave her for a few minutes and accompany him to the laboratory. Here he formally released him from his oath of service, thanked him warmly for his loyalty under such trying conditions, and offered to do anything in his power to help him or to restore his sister.

At this, Benito's stoicism gave way to an outburst of savage fury for which Oakes was not prepared. All his smooth veneer of civilization fell away, and he raged about the room like a trapped jaguar, cursing Oakes' inhuman recklessness and disregard of all his protests, the whole race of the hateful Gringos and their boasted science. Oakes watched him narrowly, on guard against violence, but sympathizing with the misery and despair which fed his fury.

In a few minutes, worn out by the tempest of emotion and the strain of the sleepless night, he threw himself into a chair and buried his face in his arms. Then Oakes slipped quietly out of the room, returning presently with hot coffee, which he succeeded after some trouble in getting him to drink.

As he recovered some measure of composure, Oakes renewed his offer, assuring him that anything he could suggest should be done. At last Benito shook off his depression, and answered that his only hope was to leave this horrible country and take his sister to her own people, who had a skill in such matters far beyond the resources of modern medical science. To this Oakes assented promptly, reinforced by the opinion of the doctor, who frankly admitted that he could do nothing but await developments.

While the preparations for the journey went forward, Oakes found time to remove the deadly bud of the serpent flower and subject it to an exhaustive analysis. At the end, he straightened up and stared at his results in complete bafflement. The bud contained no trace of any known poison.

NEXT morning he put the facts before the doctor, calling in a specialist in toxicology to confirm his results. The doctor, himself a famous authority, received the report calmly.

"I thought as much," he said, and asked a few keen questions about the history of the plant and the connection of the Senorita with its worship.

"It seems clear enough," he went on. "There is not the slightest evidence of any actual poison which could be responsible for our patient's condition. My examination of the lady herself and yours of the plant are entirely negative. But she knew, from those devilish ceremonies you have described, that the touch of the bud was certain death. She had an absolutely fixed conviction of

this. Therefore, when she felt the prick of its sharp tip on her shoulder, she knew herself instantly to be a dead woman—and she died, so far as her conscious, voluntary functions are concerned. But her involuntary, unconscious functions—heart and breathing—not sharing in her convictions, and not affected by any actual poison, still persist, and may do so indefinitely. A very unusual but quite typical case of complete auto-hypnosis."

Oakes drew a deep breath and looked at him steadily.

"But the poor lad on the altar," he said: "he died right enough, I'm sure of that."

"Quite possibly," said the doctor. "But your Cobra Lily didn't kill him. Don't forget that a good many sacred ceremonies are based on appearances rather than facts."

Oakes considered this. "And if we take the poor girl back?" he asked.

"It might do the trick," said the doctor. "The familiar ceremonies and sounds, and perhaps some ancient hypnotic powers of the priests—quite possibly they might release the inhibitions of her own making, and restore her immediately."

Oakes rose. "Thank you," he said. "And I am going back with them. I must save the lady if it is possible—and I want to find out what killed the boy."

The doctor nodded. "Fair enough," he said. "Only—watch your step, my boy. They seem to be rather abrupt and ruthless in their methods, from what you tell me."

AND so the Senorita, a beautiful living image of Death, motionless on her couch, guarded by the sleepless vigilance of her brother and the nurses whom Oakes had provided, went back to her own again. And with her went the Cobra Lily, strange and horrible familiar of the Serpent God of the Mayas, instinct with a venom which modern science could neither name nor cure.

Margaret, sobered by the tragedy of the Senorita's mysterious affliction, had conquered the protests of her heart and come to recognize the duty of her lover to do what he could to relieve the dreadful situation, even though she trembled at the risks he must run. And his mother, hiding her dismay behind smiling lips, sent her son into the danger he was bound to face with the quiet courage of her race and breeding.

Oakes had put at Benito's disposal every resource that money and intelligence could provide, and five days out from home the little party was transferred from the steamer to a powerful motor-boat, which was lying off the mouth of the river which offered the easiest approach to their goal. In this they made the trip up-river in some comfort, and so came at length and unmolested to the landing place, where the trail, already overgrown, led up through the jungle to Oakes' camp site, on the way to the temple court.

Here Benito drew Oakes aside.

"Senor," he said, "you are a brave man, and just—a true *Caballero*. Turn now and go back to your own people. You have saved my life, and you have done all in your power to save my sister. You released me from my oath of service—but it is not for you to release me, Senor. The oath stands. My life is yours, and I must protect your life with my own, to the last drop of my blood. But here, where we are about to go, no one can save you."

Oakes looked him in the eye. "Good man," he said quietly; "but—that is not my way. I must go through with it."

With that Benito had to be content, and presently the file of carriers was cutting its toilsome way up through the tangle of jungle growth. Oakes instructed the motor-boat engineer to stay where he was for two days—and after that to use his own judgment.

That night, in the ruined temple court, was played out the final scene in its Priestess' mission of vengeance. The carved walls gleamed and wavered again in the flaring light of the torches, and a group of priests waited in solemn council before the great stone altar and the empty vase.

Out of the darkness Benito entered at last, weary and broken, leading his party of bearers carrying his sister's body in a litter slung from poles, and the box containing the Serpent Flower. And behind the box strode Henry Adams Oakes going into action with his jaw set and his eyes vigilant. As he entered there was a little stir among the waiting priests, and two guards silently slipped between him and the entrance. There should be a reckoning with this Gringo robber a little later.

Benito knelt and made his plea to the council, and awaited the verdict with bowed head, expecting condemnation. The priests conferred, raised the body of their Priestess from its litter and bore it slowly to the altar, where they gathered closely about it, uniting in a low-toned chant and ritual. Others took the Serpent Flower from its casket and placed it once more in its great stone vase.

At a signal the tom toms sounded again, very softly, the rhythm of the serpent dance, the priests fell back from the altar, and slowly, slowly, the Priestess lifted her head, and her eyes gleamed in the torch light; slowly she raised herself upon her arms, rose to her knees upon the altar, and stared at the Serpent Flower in its vase, its tall stem fallen toward her as if making obeisance. A slow triumphant smile dawned upon her face, she made an imperious gesture and the priests circled the altar in a mad, swirling, twisting dance, the tom toms booming savagely.

She lifted her hand and the drums died, the dancers stood rooted. Then she saw Oakes standing beyond the vase, his guards beside him, and her smile was not good to see. The fury of jealousy and of vengeance flared up in her, unabated by the long days she had spent in the shadow of death. At her command the circle of priests opened and Oakes' guards pushed him forward. He struck off their hands and strode to the rim of the great altar, facing the Priestess.

She stared at him with glowing eyes. "Ah!" she murmured, "always cold, always brave, fearing neither God nor man—nor even woman. How I could have loved you! But you—you poor fool—you flouted me for that pale girl of your horrible North—a creature with iced water in her veins!"

She turned away her eyes and spoke rapidly, imperiously, in the harsh Indian tongue, to the knot of priests, who had closed about Oakes. Her furious eyes and passionate inflections and gestures made her meaning only too plain to him; she was charging him with sacrilege, with defiling her temple and stealing the sacred plant, and with attempting to destroy their Priestess through a cruel device, by the power of the Serpent Flower itself. And she finished by demanding that here and now, on this altar which he had desecrated, he should meet the vengeance of the Serpent God.

Her appeal roused the priests to a fury like her own. A dozen hands clutched Oakes and twisted him round to throw him upon the altar at the Priestess' knees.

Then Benito called out a warning, in a high, vibrating voice, and the priests paused. But the Priestess, her fury mounting at the interruption, blazed out at him in Spanish, calling him a dog, a slave to this Gringo, and no brother of hers; and lapsing again into the Indian speech, she ordered the priests to prepare the victim.

Oakes, his shoulders braced against the rim of the altar, slipped his right hand under his tunic to the heavy automatic in its scabbard beneath his left arm-pit. This reminded him of one of those nasty scrimmages in the German dug-outs. If they were bound to have a killing, he would try to do his part.

As his fingers closed on the weapon, he glimpsed a sudden movement by Benito that fixed his attention. The man stepped backward to one of the guards and snatched from his hands what seemed to be a staff of bamboo, about six feet long. He threw this up to his lips, leveling it at the Priestess. There sounded above the hoarse breathing of the struggling men that same weird, puffing *hiss* which Oakes had heard once before, and something flickered like light past his head.

A harsh scream burst from the Priestess, a horrible, strangling shriek, and, twisting out of the slack hands of his captors, Oakes turned to see her clutching wildly at a tiny tuft of gay feathers which seemed to be stuck upon the creamy pallor of her full throat.

"Good God!" he gasped, "a blow-gun! I might have known!"

And on the word the Priestess sank face down upon the carved surface of her altar, all her fury drowned forever in the full tide of death. The awful *curari* poison gives no time for farewells.

IT SEEMED to Oakes that minutes passed while every man stood as if struck to stone. Then he found Benito by his side, his eyes blazing, but his breath coming in rending sobs.

"It was the only way!" he whispered. Then, laying one hand on the altar and putting the other on Oakes' shoulder, he cried out in Spanish, in his high, ringing voice:

"Sanctuary! my brothers. Sanctuary! My hand is on the altar! None may touch me save the Serpent God himself!"

The priests gave back sullenly, their blood-lust slowly ebbing away. An aged man, frail but evidently of high authority among them, stepped between them and the two who leaned against the altar. To him Benito spoke in the Indian tongue, rapidly, with passionate sincerity, pointing to Oakes as the saviour of his life, to whose defense he was forever bound by their own Law—the Law of the Mayas. More he said as to the plant and its return, and the care of his sister, their Priestess. On that word his voice broke for a moment, then he drew himself up stoically and awaited the verdict.

The old priest turned slowly and spoke a few words to his colleagues. They fell away into two lines, leaving free passage to the entrance. He turned again and spoke in Spanish to Oakes.

"Go now, Senor!" he said: "Your folly has cost us a precious life, but your courage has saved another, and our own Law protects you. You are a fool, Senor—but a brave man."

Benito turned his eyes upon his sister's body.

"No, my son," said the old priest; "she belongs to us—she remains here! Go now—and make haste!"

The trail was broad and easy now, and they passed rapidly, watchful but unharmed, through that black and breathless jungle, which seemed to listen and whisper all about them. Soon after sunrise they reached the boat and got under way at once. Benito fell into a profound depression and refused to speak or to eat, all that day, sitting listlessly in the stern and watching his jungles pass away into dimness behind him.

But the next day, as the fast motor boat neared the mouth of the river, Oakes roused him with a hand on his shoulder.

"We part here, my friend," he said; "our score is even, my life for yours—but yours was the better courage. You must go back to your own people, and think of me only as your good friend, if ever you need one."

Benito stood up and their eyes met.

"A true *Caballero!*" he muttered, and held out his hand, the first time he had shaken hands as an equal.

They stood side by side without further words as the boat drew into the landing where Benito was to go ashore. Suddenly he turned to Oakes.

"I swear to you," he said, "that I never suspected any trick with the serpent flower. We have always believed in it. How did you know?"

Oakes smiled at him. "Gringo science," he answered, "and a chance to get close to it, thanks to you. I believe they run a bamboo rod through the stem and a man in the hollow bottom of the vase moves the bud back and forth in time with the signals. I own it fooled me that first time. It was only the hiss of the blow-gun"—

There he stopped. Benito's face quivered with the poignant memory that word called up. He nodded, turned away and as the boat swung to the landing stage, he stepped ashore in silence.

Only as the boat drew off again, he lifted his hat in the Latin fashion.

"Go with God, my friend!" he called, using the stately Spanish phrase.

An hour later, lying off the mouth of the river, Oakes saw a steamer sweep round the headland to the north—a great, white, shining ship. The motor-boat shot forward to meet it.

Behind him lay the jungle, with its beauty, its mystery, its savage tragedy and heartbreak. Coming toward him was the symbol and the promise of God's country.

Unconsciously, he stretched out his arms to it.

The Marvel Dog of Science

DOLPH, a police dog of Portland, Ore., does more than bark. Scientists call him the canine with a super brain. They further declare that he is possessed of telepathic powers because of the seemingly uncanny way in which he interprets commands, frequently even before his master, Max Mueller, utters them.

Among the many wondrous things accredited to Dolph, is that he can ferret out the hiding-place of any lost article or purposely concealed one.

Experts attribute his inexplicable trailing powers to an over-developed faculty of scent. But they are at a loss to explain why he will run along a trail and then cut short catching up with it at the other end, to save himself a lot of useless chasing. Likewise they are puzzled to know how he is so unflinchingly certain that an article has been buried or placed upon a post or building out of sight.

Dolph can be locked in a room and still perform his trick of finding hidden articles, though no audible command be given.

"Mental telepathy," says Mueller. "He can read the human mind." In which opinion several scientists who claim to know, concur.

WEIRD CRIMES

No. 3. The Magic Mirror Murders

By SEABURY QUINN

"*WIE GEHTS,* Barbara," the blacksmith of the little Bavarian hamlet of Loisenrieth greeted the daughter of Peter Reisinger.

"*Wie gehts, landsmann,*" pretty Barbara replied from her doorstep. "Think you yon cloud bodes ill weather this morning?"

The blacksmith studied a fleck of cotton-wool vapor riding languidly across the blue German sky, then turned his smile on Barbara again.

"*Nein,*" he opined, "'tis but a wind cloud. But why so anxious about the weather? Is it to a picnic party you go, all decked in your pretties?"

Barbara brushed the tip of her nose with a tiny cluster of corn flowers plucked from her father's dooryard. Indeed, as the blacksmith had said, she was dressed in her finest. A cloth skirt, a neat little jacket of the same material, a blouse of coarse linen, spotlessly laundered, pinchbeck ear-rings—even stockings of white cotton and leather shoes were among her morning finery. And by this last it might be known she was wearing the very best her wardrobe afforded, for poverty rode heavily on the shoulders of the Bavarian peasantry in 1807, and both men and women went barefoot, or shod with wood, except upon gala occasions. Stockings and leather shoes were worn only to mass, in celebration of the King's birthday, or other extraordinary fetes.

The girl smiled coquettishly at her neighbor.

"Perhaps I go to look for work; perhaps to seek a husband—who knows?" she answered.

"But—" the blacksmith began, then broke off with a puzzled shake of his head. The ways of young folks were beyond him. He resumed his way toward his forge, while Barbara set out in the opposite direction along the hamlet's single street.

When the day's work was done the blacksmith returned to his home and his evening meal of black bread and pea soup. But Barbara did not return that night. Barbara did not return at all. It was as if she had walked over the rim of the earth at the horizon.

Her parents made frantic inquiries for her; weeks and months went by; but no one could tell them of her whereabouts.

Village heads were shaken, dire surmises of her fate were uttered by local wiseacres, and her disappearance had taken its place in neighborhood tradition, almost, when gossip was suddenly revived by the disappearance of Katherine Seidel, a belle of the neighboring community of Regendorf.

Early in January, 1808, Katherine had set out from her father's house, also dressed in the best clothes she possessed. Like Barbara, she answered questions concerning her destination evasively, and like Barbara, she seemed to vanish like a smoke wreath from her grandsire's pipe. She was gone. And no one could —or would—give any news of her.

Matters might have simmered down in her case as in that of Barbara Reisinger, had it not been that Katherine's elder sister, Wallburga Seidel, was a spinster of more than ordinary firmness of purpose. While others shrugged their shoulders over Katherine's disappearance—some even hinting the path she had taken led to the sort of ease purchased with shame—Wallburga insisted her little sister was the victim of foul play. So vehemently did she assert this belief to all she talked with that the neighbors began to look upon her with a sort of tolerant pity.

One day, early in the spring of 1808, Wallburga was passing through the public market of Regendorf when she espied, with amazement, a bit of cloth she recognized as coming from the skirt Katherine had worn the morning she left home.

Entering the shop, she excitedly demanded whence the cloth came. After a moment's hesitation the Hebrew proprietor of the place informed her he had bought the goods from a certain Frau Bichel, wife of Andrew Bichel, a day-laborer who lived nearby. He volunteered the further information that Frau Bichel was one of his regular customers, trading cloth and trinkets for goods, and often selling him garments or cloth remnants for cash.

Though this offered no real evidence to support her suspicions, Wallburga felt more convinced than ever that her sister had been murdered or spirited away, and determined to find what part Bichel had played in the mystery.

With greater cunning than might have been expected from one of her station in life, she went not directly to Bichel's house, but to the neighborhood in which he lived. Pretending to be in search of work, she interviewed every household in the vicinity of the Bichel home, bringing in the Bichel family incidentally in her conversation and adding together such scraps of information as different neighbors let drop. That night she reviewed the result of her work, and found herself in possession of the following facts and rumors:

Andrew Bichel, a day-laborer and the son of a day-laborer, was about forty-eight years old. Because of his indolence he was usually out of employment, and the small vegetable garden before his house was more productive of weeds than any other crop.

About a year before, however, his fortunes had suddenly taken a turn for the better. He had, in some way, secured a couple of pigs, a goat and several geese, and had been heard to boast of the contemplated purchase of a cow. None of the neighbors could account for this sudden prosperity, since Bichel had been, if possible, lazier since his fortunes began to mend than before.

His clothing, and that of his wife, was noticeably better than formerly, and, disregarding the usual custom of having all his garments made at home, he had fallen to patronizing a nearby tailor, he supplying the materials, while the tailor fashioned the garments.

Bichel was noted for his good nature, or, rather, for his lack of aggressiveness,

in former days having permitted himself to be bested in every encounter, whether physical or verbal, rather than defend himself. He was known for a coward, both physical and moral, always seeking to ingratiate himself with those he met, and resorting to the most servile flattery in order to secure the barest toleration from his acquaintances. Of late he had achieved greater esteem among a certain element of the locality, since he had shown a willingness to buy beer for whoever would consent to drink with him at the inn.

It must be remembered that fiscal conditions in the Germany of that day were as stringent as those of the post-war period, only the pressure was from exactly the opposite direction. In the disorganization following the World War the republic suffered from an inflated currency—literally from too much money. In 1808, poverty was due to lack of money of any sort, and a few pence, secured by the sale of articles of little intrinsic worth, might easily raise a peasant to a position far above that of his struggling neighbors, whose whole time was occupied in securing the barest necessaries of life.

Bearing this in mind, we can realize how articles of practically no value, provided they could be obtained without cost, might enable a poverty-crushed German to outdistance his fellows—a floating log is valueless to the man on shore; to the spent swimmer it may mean salvation.

Wallburga Seidel was aware of all this; a lifetime of poverty had impressed her with a very definite appreciation of values, even the value of a piece of secondhand clothing. *And her sister had worn an entire outfit of new clothing, besides several articles of cheap jewelry on the day she disappeared.*

Wallburga pondered the information she had gleaned for several days before she again sought the neighborhood where Bichel lived. A few guarded inquiries disclosed the name of the tailor Bichel patronized. She located his shop, and, pretending faintness from the heat (it was early May), went in and begged a drink of water.

While the tradesman fetched her a cup, she inspected his shop, and suddenly started forward in her seat. Upon a hook, ready for delivery, hung a waistcoat, and it was made of cloth such as her vanished sister had worn for a cloak when last seen.

"*Danke schoen,*" she told the tailor, draining the dipper he handed her. Then, as she rose to leave, she turned, surveying his wares carelessly. "That waistcoat," she said, pointing to the garment which had set her pulses racing, "it is a pretty thing. You make it for some *graff*—some great gentleman—no?"

"*Nein,*" laughed the tailor, shaking his head. "No great gentleman comes to this shop. I make it for a neighbor, one Herr Bichel.

"Yes, it is pretty, is it not?" he added, stroking the soft cloth. "Almost, I think, too pretty for man's wear. 'Twould be better in a lady's cloak, not?"

"*Ja, ja!*" ejaculated Wallburga, chokingly, as she stumbled from the astonished tailor's place. "Yes, yes, for a lady's cloak, to be sure!" And she burst into peals of hysterical laughter.

"Oh, sister, dear little sister," she sobbed as she half walked, half ran along the dusty road toward Bichel's house, "some one has done you an injury. But Wallburga will find out. Wallburga will never rest till she has found you. And—" she clenched her work-worn hands in frenzy—"and if they have dared to harm you—*ach Gott!*—'twould be better for them had they never seen the sun!"

A few minutes' hurried walk brought her to Bichel's door, upon which she hammered unceremoniously. Bichel himself answered her summons, smiling pleasantly.

"You wished to see me?" he inquired politely.

"Wretch!" Wallburga cried. "My sister; my little sister, Katherine—what have you done with her?"

Bichel's pale features remained politely inquiring. Not the tremor of a muscle betrayed her words had touched an uneasy conscience.

"Katherine?" he repeated, as though puzzled. "What Katherine? I know many young ladies by that name."

Choking with emotion, Wallburga declared herself the sister of the vanished Katherine Seidel, and again demanded an account of her sister.

Bichel heard her through, then repeated his declaration of innocence. He knew no Katherine Seidel, he insisted; never remembered having known a girl by that name. The *fraulein* was mistaken. She was excited. The heat, perhaps. Would not the *fraulein* enter and partake of a cup of goat's milk? It had a very soothing effect on those affected by the unseasonable spring heat.

So sincere he seemed, and so genuinely anxious to help her that Wallburga's suspicions were almost disarmed. But there was the evidence of the piece of cloth in the market stall, and the new waistcoat at the tailor's.

Wallburga left the Bichel home and sought the *Untersuchungs Richter*, or Provincial Magistrate.

The police system of Bavaria at that time was decidedly defective. Indeed, as we understand the term today, there was practically none. Each village had its constable, or police officer, whose duties were more of a supervisory than a police nature. He seldom, if ever, patrolled the streets, nor did his authority extend beyond the impounding of misdemeanants.

In addition to these purely local and inefficient officers, there was the gendarmerie, or military police, whose duties were twofold, the protection of the government from political offenders, and the enforcement of the magistrates' mandates. In this latter duty, which was wholly subordinate to that of arresting political enemies of the crown, they acted almost as our modern bailiffs or United States marshals, not attempting action on their own initiative; but waiting the direction of the magistrate. A certificate of suspicion from the examining judge was necessary to set the police machinery in motion, as a warrant from a U. S. Commissioner or judge is required before lawful search and seizure may be made in this country.

But slow-moving and inadequate as the Bavarian gendarmerie of a century ago was, it possessed the German characteristic of thoroughness, and once a magistrate's order was handed them, the officers kept at their task till they had some definite report to make.

With painstaking care the gendarmes interrogated every resident within a mile of Bichel's home, making voluminous notes of the answers they received. Their investigation began on May 19, 1808; by nightfall they had taken testimony from every man, woman and child in Bichel's neighborhood, and had gleaned one fact of prime importance—several young girls had gone to Bichel's house "to see their fortunes in a glass." And, though several neighbors had testified to this, *not one could be found who could say he had seen one of the girls since.*

In the forenoon of May 20 two sergeants of police went to Bichel's house. He was gone to a nearby fair where goods of all descriptions—including second-hand clothing—were bought and sold.

The officers walked round the house, inspected the outbuildings, glanced at the garden and returned to the doorstep. Lighting their porcelain pipes, they seated themselves in the shade. Bichel must return some time—every-

one came home sooner or later—life was relatively long, and a day of waiting mattered little. Besides, sitting in the shade was vastly preferable to marching over miles of dusty road to the fair.

A nervously energetic Latin, or an efficient Anglo-Saxon policeman would have exhibited symptoms of hydrophobia at sight of such tactics; but the Germans understood German psychology. At nightfall Bichel returned, his pockets clinking with copper and silver, the proceeds of his day's trading, and the sergeants matter-of-factly placed him under arrest.

There was no haste in the proceedings. Bichel was permitted thirty-six hours in solitary confinement to allow his conscience to begin its work, then summoned before the examining judge.

This official kept the prisoner waiting beside his table for several minutes while he pretended to be busily examining some papers. At length he looked up, staring at Bichel as though he had been some novel sort of animal. "Do you know the reason for your arrest, Andrew Bichel?" he asked, at length.

"*Nein, Mein Herr,*" replied the prisoner with a servile bow.

"So?" The magistrate raised his eyebrows. "You do not? Very well." He motioned to a gendarme, and Bichel was conducted back to his solitary cell.

Another day and night elapsed, and Bichel was again led into the magistrate's presence.

"Andrew Bichel," said the judge, "tell me why you are arrested."

"*Mein Herr,*" replied Bichel, "upon the Holy Cross, I cannot imagine."

"Then you must have a few days of rest and quiet to stimulate your imagination," the magistrate answered.

There were no such things as writs of *habeas corpus* in Bavaria. When a prisoner refused to talk he was lodged in solitary confinement until his tongue loosened.

Andrew Bichel spent a week more in his cell, during which he heard no voice and saw no human face, even his food being passed to him through a small opening in his dungeon door, which permitted him no sight of his jailors.

Seven days' meditation eroded Bichel's resolution; the next time he faced the judge he was ready to talk.

As before the magistrate asked, "Andrew Bichel, do you know why you are arrested?"

"Yes, *Mein Herr,*" answered the prisoner, "it is in connection with the disappearance of Katherine Seidel."

"And Barbara Reisinger, what of her?" supplemented the judge.

"Ye-yes, your worship," faltered Bichel, "and Barbara Reisinger, too."

"Where are they; what did you do with them?" the magistrate demanded.

"Oh, *Mein Herr,*" the trembling wretch protested, "I did nothing with them. On the Holy Tree, by the beard of St. Andrew, my patron, I did them no injury. They came to me—they pestered me to get them their fortunes told. I knew a man—no, your excellence, I do not know his name, nor whence he comes—I knew a certain man who can divine the future. This man—he has but one eye, your exaltedness, and is also plagued with a goitre—this man came to my poor house and showed these misguided girls their future husbands in a peep-show."

"A peep-show?" echoed the judge. "What kind of peep-show?"

"A crystal ball, your nobleness."

"A crystal ball? Did you not say it was a peep-show?"

"Yes, your honorableness, but I meant a crystal ball, such as Eastern fakirs use."

"What know you of Eastern fakirs, Andrew Bichel?"

"Your worship, I have read—"

"Andrew Bichel," interrupted the magistrate, "*I* can read that you are an unconscionable liar. Back to your cell, rogue! You will be questioned anon, when you are ready to tell the truth."

MEANTIME, the gendarmes had not been idle. Accompanied by a squad of men, a sergeant had searched the Bichel homestead from rooftree to cellar. In an upper room, concealed beneath a heap of trash, two roomy chests had been discovered. When the padlocks on their lids were forced, they were found literally crammed with articles of feminine apparel. Linens, skirts, jackets, cloaks, leather shoes, stockings, bits of cheap jewelry like that worn by peasant belles, combs, undergarments—enough clothing to have outfitted a small village of middle-class peasant girls was recovered from these trunks.

Most important to the prosecution, articles definitely identified as having been worn by Barbara Reisinger and Katherine Seidel were found among the chests' contents.

The judge ordered a careful inventory made of these things, and commanded the searchers to continue their work.

Scarcely believing more evidence would be unearthed, the police proceeded to make a cursory investigation of the land and outbuildings, without bringing anything more to light. But one of them was suddenly struck with the idea of utilizing a four-footed assistant.

A hunting dog was secured and turned loose in the grounds. The animal seemed at fault for some time; but when one of the officers led him into the dark shed at the rear of the lot, he betrayed increased interest.

Against this shed's rear wall was stacked a pile of manure, the pungent ammonia gas it gave off obscuring all other odors which reached the men's noses. But the dog was not to be thus fooled. He attacked the base of the pile with his fore-paws, dug tentatively a moment, then, abruptly, seated himself, pointed his muzzle skyward and emitted a dismal, long-drawn-out howl. Country bred, the policemen recognized the sound. Only too often they had heard dogs give vent to the "death cry" when members of their masters' families had died.

"*Herr Gott!*" cried one of the men, while another crossed himself piously.

A digging fork was brought and the police attacked the dung heap. Beneath a litter of straw, quite near the surface, the lower half of a woman's body was found. The clayey soil, in combination with the straw and the manure, which shut away the air, had completely foiled the murderer's purpose. Instead of decomposing, the flesh was almost perfectly preserved, though saponification had taken place to some extent.

Feverishly, now, the police dug. A torso, the arms, finally a severed head, were brought to light. Katherine Seidel was found.

For several days the officers prosecuted their search, each succeeding excavation revealing a fresh villainy. Poor, vain little Barbara Reisinger was taken from the unconsecrated grave where she had lain nearly a year, and the bodies of other girls, not reported to the authorities, were brought forth to keep her company.

But the most ghastly phase of this terrible case appeared when surgeons summoned to view the bodies handed in their reports. In every case the women's throats bore evidence of wounds, but in no instance were these wounds sufficient to have caused immediate death. The opinion of the doctors was that *the women had been dismembered while still alive.*

The preliminary evidence secured, the examination of Andrew Bichel began.

Under the criminal code then in force in Bavaria, there were no "rules of evidence" as common law lawyers know them. Every fact germane to the case in hand was to be elicited. The accused was not permitted to face his accusers, nor was he permitted to refuse to testify against himself. The *Untersuchungs*

Richter, or examining judge, combined the duties of prosecuting attorney and police judge, being charged with the double office of examining into the crime and committing the prisoner (if the evidence warranted it) to jail to await trial by the central criminal court of the district. Prisoners might not be tortured into confession, the rack having been formally abolished by law in 1806; but they were held in close confinement during the entire period of their examination, which sometimes lasted for months.

The science of psychoanalysis had not been dreamed of in those days; yet something closely akin to it obtained in the Bavarian courts. The examining magistrate would ask the prisoner innumerable questions, many of them having only the most remote bearing on the case. Yet, at intervals, there would be sandwiched in questions of the utmost importance—questions which, coming amid irrelevant queries, might easily startle the accused into a damaging admission. All questions and answers were reduced to writing by a notary, and any unusual length of time taken by the accused in answering a given question, his demeanor at the propounding of questions calculated to elicit damaging replies, and similar facts were also noted in the minutes of the examination.*

Despite his declared intention of telling all, Bichel fenced skillfully with the judge for several days, contradicting himself a dozen times at each session; but inevitably being led to an admission of his guilt.

At length the magistrate asked him, "did you not pretend to have a magic mirror in your possession, a mirror in which young women might see their future husbands?"

Bichel was observed to change color at this; but stoutly denied it.

The judge, unhurried, confident his questions would bring out the truth, continued at intervals to ask: "Tell us of your magic mirror, Andrew Bichel," or, "Why did you pretend to have a magic mirror?"

Persistence at last prevailed. Worn out with constant questioning, his solitary confinement between court sessions making him a prey to his accusing conscience, Bichel at length broke down and confessed.

He had let it be noised about among the peasant girls, he said, that he possessed a magic mirror in which any girl looking would see her future bridegroom. And, to sweeten the bait for the silly flies he purposed catching in his web, he also said he would accept no fee for a look at this marvelous glass. But she who would see its secrets must come secretly—otherwise the charm would be broken—and she must come dressed in her best, as she would wish to appear when first beholding her future husband. His plan succeeded with shameless ease. So fast the girls applied that he had to turn some away for fear of conflicting "engagements."

The procedure was the same in each case. The victim was shown a piece of board about which a towel had been wrapped. This was the magic mirror. When the wrappings were removed, Bichel assured his dupe, the future bridegroom would stand revealed. But first he must pronounce an incantation and the girl must help him. With her own pocket handkerchief he bandaged her eyes, binding her hands behind her back with a piece of packing thread. Then, standing before the smiling girl, he pronounced these words: "Maiden, behold thy bridegroom. His name is—DEATH!" So saying, he struck her in the throat with a butcher knife he had concealed in his sleeve.

A basin was ready. He eased the terrified girl to the floor, placing the vessel where it would catch the blood from her wound, lest her clothes be stained, and so rendered unsalable. For it was for their clothing and a few tawdry trinkets that he had murdered all these innocent, credulous girls.

When the victim was exhausted, he undressed her, folded her clothes up neatly, ready to be packed in his "treasure" chests upstairs, and proceeded leisurely to dismember and bury her body.

The astounded judge asked, "But why did you anatomize them before they were dead?"

To this Bichel made the astonishing reply: "Your excellence, they squirmed. It was delightful!"

WHEN the tedious process of collecting all available evidence at length came to an end, the written report of Bichel's case, comprising several volumes of closely-written German script, was certified to the central criminal court by the examining judge.

"Weary lawyers with endless tongues" had no opportunity to address the court under the Bavarian criminal code. The defendant's legal adviser was allowed to read the transcript of testimony taken before the examining judge, then to prepare a written defense of his client. In this brief he might base his defense on either the law or the facts, or both, and might use as much space as he deemed necessary; but he might not appear in person before the court. Thus it was that many an advocate won fame as a criminal practitioner, yet had never seen the judges whose decisions his pleas swayed!

Bichel's counsel did the best he could with the handicap under which he labored, and the central criminal court doubtless read his learned defense attentively; but the result of the case was foregone.

On February 4, 1809, nearly a year after his arrest, Andrew Bichel was led into court to hear his sentence.

It was an impressive scene. The judges in their robes of office, trimmed with ermine, the royal fur, in token of their right to dispense the King's justice, sat before a long table of age-darkened oak raised three steps above the court room floor. Behind them, and before the doors and windows of the hall, stood halberdiers in coats of green and gold, the sunlight glinting on the polished heads of their weapons. The official justicer—the headsman—stood beside the steps leading to the judges' table.

A crowd had gathered to hear sentence pronounced, and broke into murmurs of suppressed rage as two stalwart jailors led the prisoner before the judges. The clamor of halberd butts on the floor brought instant silence, for the halberdiers were not slow to rap for order on the heads of the rabble if their first admonition to silence went unheeded.

Bichel halted before the judges' table, and the president of the court rose, facing him. In one hand he held a parchment scroll. Before him, on the table, lay a light wand of dried willow. The prisoner's pale face went a shade whiter as he beheld this, for well he knew what the wand portended.

A pause. The judge unrolled his parchment and read the sentence:

"That Andrew Bichel, of Regendorf, be dragged to the place of execution, and be not carried or allowed to walk; that he there be broken on the wheel from the feet upwards, without the previous mercy stroke, and that his body be afterwards exposed on the wheel as a warning to evil-doers."

As he finished, the president picked up the willow wand, snapped it in two and cast the pieces at Bichel's feet. This was to signify that as the wood was separated in two parts, so should the condemned man's soul and body be severed in the furtherance of the King's justice.

Almost insane with terror, Bichel was dragged from the court room, his vain pleas for mercy ringing fainter and

**It is to this faithful noting of the most minute details in the transcripts of these criminal examinations that we owe our ability to record practically all the important incidents in trials held more than a century ago.—Editor.*

fainter till the closing of his dungeon door shut them off completely.

Well he knew the fate awaiting him. He would be tied against a great cartwheel so that he hung like a fly caught in a web of a giant spider. Then, with a heavy sledge-hammer, the brawny executioner would rain blow after blow upon him, breaking the bones of his legs and arms, his ribs, finally crushing his skull. In ordinary cases the headsman would have given him the blow on the head first, so that the others would have been but savage mutilation of his dead body; but his sentence had expressly provided that he should "be broken on the wheel from the feet upwards without the customary mercy stroke." He would die slowly, horribly. The thought drove him shrieking against the unyielding door of his cell, striking it with his fists, crying aloud for mercy—he who had shown no pity to the girls whose finery he coveted.

Next morning, when they led him out to die, he gave a great shout of joy as he beheld the executioner. For that grim official leaned upon the handle of a great sword, not on the helve of his terrible hammer.

The court had reconsidered its decision during the night, and commuted his sentence to death by beheading, saying, "It is below the dignity of the state to vie with a criminal in cruelty."

This is the Third of a Series of Unusual Articles that Seabury Quinn is Writing for WEIRD TALES. *The Fourth Will be Published in an Early Issue.*

THE HAND OF FATMA

(Continued from page 24)

kiss her and his hot breath fanned her cheek. Where was Aomar? Oh, why—

There came a sudden noise behind the kneeling Arab—the flash of steel, a gasping grunt—and Seid, who had come to defile her, slid sideways to the floor!

Silence, tangible, heavy, burdened with tragedy. At last a low, boyish whimper; then uncertain, shuffling footsteps as Aomar staggered from the tent.

THEY found him the following morning, hiding in the bazars of Abouda. Like a dumb animal, accustomed to contempt and harshness, he had slunk away in terror from the encampment.

His eyes held a bewildered expression when Patricia rested a friendly hand upon his shoulder and asked him concerning his father. He told her he was an Englishman named d'Arro, and that the little ivory charm had been a cherished possession of his mother's.

And then Patricia informed him that he was to return with her to England. There he was to become educated, and live in a great house, with no one to revile him. She owed it to him, she said, and to the diminutive ivory hand that had so strangely brought them together.

THE MONSTROSITY

(Continued from page 68)

WELL, stranger, we didn't want no sleep after I had finished readin' them things ter the boys, even though we warn't able ter make out all them long words. But we did git their meanin'; leastways, we got *some* o' 'em.

Next day Hank, he says we all ought ter git them bodies an' bury 'em, and we does so. 'Bout the time that we gits settled down ter livin' comfortable agin, here come one o' them furriners from Vienny, an' what does he do but dig up the boy, an' takes him away. 'Course we don't see him no more, but the old house—why, it's stood there empty, gettin' rottener every day what passes.

RULE OF TERROR THREATENED

AS a result of an injunction granted by Judge Charles O. Busick, which makes I. W. W.'s subject to six months jail sentences for contempt of court on proof of membership, it is stated that Sacramento, California, is to be subjected to a "rule of terror" by that organization. An official of the organization is alleged to have said that the drive on the city would begin in the early fall, at which time they would teach Sacramento a lesson.

It is also reported that plans are under way for the promotion of a general industrial strike to take in agriculture, lumber and general construction camps. The district attorney of Sacramento County brought the suit for the injunction in the name of the people of the state of California. I. W. W.'s may be imprisoned without jury trial under the terms of the writ.

CHILD DIES FROM CANDY LODGED IN THROAT

A SMALL piece of peanut candy, lodged in the throat, caused the death of Donald Wilson, 18-months-old son of Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Wilson, of Princeton, Ill. Death occurred at the University hospital at Ann Arbor, Mich., where the mother, together with her two sons, were visiting. The candy was lodged in the child's throat in such a manner as to cause strangulation. Frantic efforts of physicians to overcome the difficulty failed, and the child died on the operating table.

SWALLOWED DIAMONDS ASSESSED BY EX-RAY

FRANZ BUTNER is an animated jewel case.

A short time ago he settled the estate of a relative in Germany and inherited a number of valuable diamonds. Instead of disposing of them in Germany for a few billion marks, he carried them aboard ship with him when he embarked for this country.

While at sea he suddenly thought of the customs inspectors and was appalled by the thought of the duty he would have to pay Uncle Sam. In desperation, he swallowed them.

An X-Ray was used in fixing the value of the gems.

FIND SKELETONS OF THREE MEN FIFTEEN THOUSAND YEARS OLD

FURTHER excavations at Solutre, near Macon, where scientists have already found thousands of bones of prehistoric horses and buffaloes, have just brought to light skeletons of three Cromagnon men. The skeletons, which are intact, give a perfect illustration of the physical characteristics of man 15,000 years ago. They are of men between twenty and thirty years old and of great stature. The skull in each case is well developed, but not of great length. The nose is long and the jaw exaggeratedly high.

BOY BITES TONGUE OFF

MASTER VINCENT OLDS, son of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Olds of Wyanet, met with a very painful accident recently, when hit by an automobile. He was playing with another boy when he ran in front of an automobile on the hard road, which runs through the main section of Wyanet. His jaws set in such a manner that he practically bit his tongue off. He was rushed to the Perry Memorial hospital at Princeton, where surgeons found it necessary to take twenty stitches to close the wound and replace the tongue.

BEAN BLOWER FATAL TO CHILD OF SIX

JOHN T. HUME, JR., six, died in the Garfield Park hospital, Chicago, from a wound caused by a bean blower. Johnnie was playing with his "pal," Buddy Fray, near his home. They were blowing beans at each other when Johnnie stumbled and fell, driving the bean blower into his head through the roof of his mouth. The lad died shortly after his father had carried him to the hospital.

Masterpieces of Weird Fiction

No. 5. The Black Cat

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

[*The Philadelphia United States Saturday Post, August* 19, 1843; 1845.]

For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But tomorrow I die, and today I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified—have tortured—have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but Horror—to many they will seem less terrible than *baroques*. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place—some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and a sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and selfsacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere *Man*.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and *a cat*.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever *serious* upon this point—and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered.

Pluto—this was the cat's name—was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character—through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance—had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!—and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish—even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

When reason returned with the morning—when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch—I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of Perverseness. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only—that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute. One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;—hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart—hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and *because* I felt it had given me no reason of offense;—hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it—if such a thing were possible—even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair.

I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts—and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire—a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words "strange!" "singular!" and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in *bas relief* upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic *cat*. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous. There was a rope about the animal's neck.

When I first beheld this apparition—for I could scarcely regard it as less—my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length

reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd—by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the *ammonia* from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place.

One night as I sat, half stupefied, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of Gin, or of Rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat—a very large one—fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast.

Upon my touching him, he immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This, then, was the very creature of which I was in search. I at once offered to purchase it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it—knew nothing of it—had never seen it before.

I continued my caresses, and, when I prepared to go home, the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but I know not how or why it was—its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed. By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually—very gradually—I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.

What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures.

With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly—let me confess it at once—by absolute *dread* of the beast.

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil—and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own—yes, even in this felon's cell, I am almost ashamed to own—that the terror and horror with which the animal inspired me, had been heightened by one of the merest chimæras it would be possible to conceive. My wife had called my attention, more than once, to the character of the mark of white hair, of which I have spoken, and which constituted the sole visible difference between the strange beast and the one I had destroyed. The reader will remember that this mark, although large, had been originally very indefinite; but, by slow degrees—degrees nearly imperceptible, and which for a long time my Reason struggled to reject as fanciful—it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name—and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster *had I dared*—it was now, I say, the image of a hideous—of a ghastly thing—of the Gallows!—oh, mournful and terrible engine of Horror and of Crime—of Agony and of Death!

And now was I indeed wretched beyond the wretchedness of mere Humanity. And *a brute beast*—whose fellow I had contemptuously destroyed—*a brute beast* to work out for *me*—for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God—so much of insufferable woe! Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of Rest any more! During the former the creature left me no moment alone; and, in the latter, I started, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of *the thing* upon my face, and its vast weight—an incarnate Night-Mare that I had no power to shake off—incumbent eternally upon my *heart!*

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates—the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind; while, from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas! was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers.

One day she accompanied me, upon some household errand, into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan.

This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith, and with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbors. Many projects entered my mind. At one period I thought of cutting the corpse into minute fragments, and destroying them by fire. At another, I resolved to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I deliberated about casting it in the well in the yard—about packing it in a box, as if merchandize, with the usual arrangements, and so getting a porter to take it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better expedient than either of these. I determined to wall it up in the cellar—as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims.

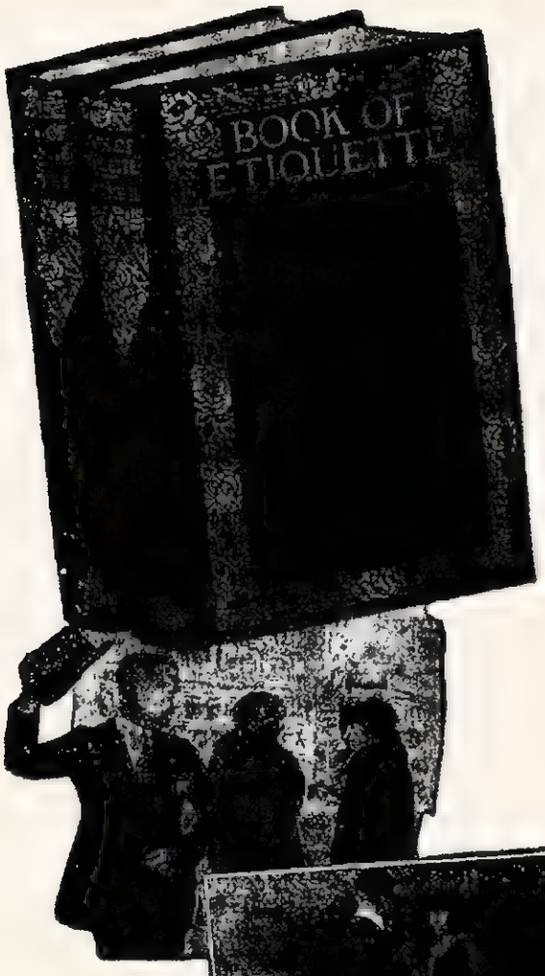
For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up, and made to resemble the rest of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect anything suspicious.

And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crow-bar I easily dislodged the bricks, and, having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that position, while, with little trouble, I re-laid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brick-work. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The rubbish on the floor was picked up with the minutest care. I looked around triumphantly, and said to myself—"Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain."

My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much wretchedness; for I had, at length, firmly resolved to put it to death. Had I been able to meet with it, at the moment, there could have been no doubt of its fate; but it appeared that the crafty animal had been alarmed at the violence of my previous anger, and forebore to present itself in my present mood. It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom. It did not make its appearance during the night—and thus for one night at least, since its introduction into the house, I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, *slept* even with the burden of murder upon my soul!

The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor came not. Once again I breathed as a freeman. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises forever! I should behold it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little.

(Continued on page 96)



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THE EYRIE

WE'VE often remarked in this department that writers are a queer lot; and the heap of mail on our desk this morning persuades us to say so again. Here we have further proof that the person who is devoid of even the faintest gleam of literary talent is usually obsessed with the notion that he should be placed among the world's immortals, while the man who really possesses the divine fire, whose innate gift is indisputable, often wonders if he can write at all.

Consider, for instance, this alleged manuscript from a gentleman who lives somewhere west of the Mississippi. It is written with a soft lead pencil on both sides of assorted sheets of paper, which apparently have been used to clean the cook stove; and the man doesn't live who can make any sense of it. In a word, it's a mess.

And now consider the note that accompanies it. This note crisply informs us that the "story" is for sale for $1,800 cash, payable by "return mail," that it must immediately be copyrighted in the "author's" name, and that foreign rights, book rights, photoplay rights and all other rights must be sold for the "author's" benefit.

We don't know whether this self-styled "author" is kidding us or not; but we rather think he isn't. We incline to the belief that he belongs in that crowd of odd misfits, mentioned above.

Then, by way of contrast—and as additional evidence for our argument—glance at this letter from Seabury Quinn. You who have read him in WEIRD TALES know how Quinn can write. He's a "born writer" if one ever lived. And we've dozens of letters from delighted readers, enthusiastically singing his praise. We heartily subscribe to these glowing encomiums. And yet Quinn himself sometimes wonders if his fiction is worth our while!

"As long as you and your readers want 'em," he says in this note to us, "I can send you these stories, and I'll see to it that the criticisms (deserved, I admit) of the rejected stories can't be brought against my future contributions. . . . When you get a chance let me know how these stories strike you, and when you want more. I'm all set to give you as many more as you may require, but, being naturally a lazy son-of-a-gun, I don't want to spoil a lot of good white paper unless I know you like to see the manuscripts."

You may be sure that we've written Quinn that we'd like to see all the manuscripts he writes; and, judging by what we hear from our readers, his admirers will never tire of him.

NOW let us see what our readers are saying about us this morning. Here's a choice bit from Walter Thomas Lee, Jr., of Denver:

"Dear Mr. Baird: This letter serves a manifest double purpose: it provides needed exercise for a restless typewriter; and, pre-eminently, it is a fortuitous spillway for a dam of long-pent up—three or four moons—enthusiasm in regard to the ultimate magazine: WEIRD TALES. Yet, even so, the deplorable inadequacy of our revered English is never quite so obvious as in an instance of this sort. Only the pithy superlatives in the language of some super-civilized, Wells-conceived planet could interpret my feeling (I do not hyperbolize) toward your infinitely soul-satisfying departure from mechanical, plotless literature.

"Especially delectable was the recent Austin Hall masterpiece: 'The People of the Comet.' I frankly admit that his type of story has a greater appeal to me than your others; they are so delightfully improbable. . . . and convincing! I should like to predict that Hall's intriguing theory of ions and cohesion ultimately will be examined. . . . but I digress. . . .

"I was particularly interested in 'The Dead Man's Tale' (though I do not inordinately admire spiritualism) because I am so fortunate as to reside in the same city with its author, Willard E. Hawkins. 'The Moon Terror' was excellent, as was 'Penelope,' though the latter—as Mr. Lovecraft says—is not highly astronomical.

"But no previous issue can possibly compare with your latest, that of October. I must confess to a certain radical hirsute elevation on reading 'The Hairy Monster.' That ten gallons of blood. . ! 'Devil Manor' was pleasingly original and strikingly bizarre. And, by the wayside, Farnsworth Wright is somewhat of a humorist: he is quite enjoyable. I thought no one could ever approach Lemon's 'Autobiography of a Blue Ghost' in the field of weird humor, but 'An Adventure in the Fourth Dimension'—though not surpassing it—equals it in potential mirth. H. P. Lovecraft manipulates an inimitable pen: he is extraordinary, as is 'Dagon.'

"Herein, I have tried to give you an idea of my opinion of WEIRD TALES; but, as should be evident, I have read so selfishly of the best stories, my opinion necessarily is based on those stories. Yet all in all, there is no magazine in print which parallels it, in policy or quality. And in view of the fact that I (hasten the day!) am an incipient weird tale writer, it is not unusual that I should enjoy your admirably bloodful, indispensable magazine. No es verdad?

"And, anon, let us have more of Austin Hall. . . . thank you."

H. P. Lovecraft's uncanny stories are making a decided hit, it seems. We continue to get letters praising "Dagon," and we wonder what the reaction will be on his "Picture in the House," which, in our opinion, is a much better piece of work. Clement Wood of Hastings-on-Hudson says that "'Dagon' was sustained and excellent to the end," while P. J. Campbell of Ridgefarm, Illinois, declares the same story "is a little masterpiece of its kind." And others have written in similar vein. After reading them, we feel impelled to show you this letter from the author:

"My Dear Baird: I was exceedingly

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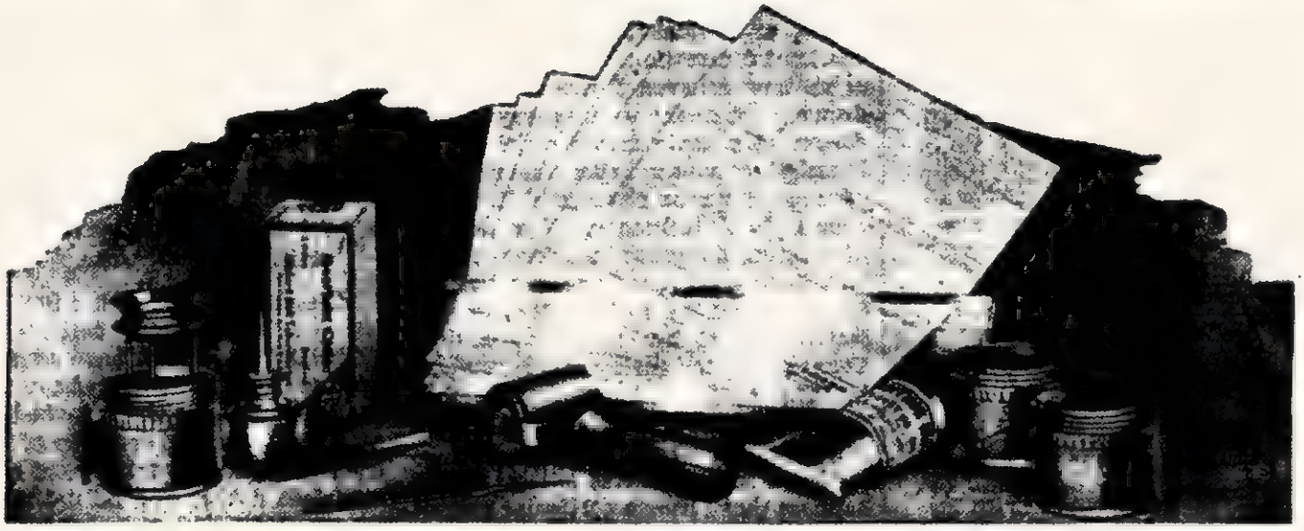

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pleased with the appearance of 'Dagon,' which seems virtually free from misprints, and which has a particularly excellent illustration. You can't imagine how relieved I was to see that drawing, for there is always such danger of a hasty sketch which either literally or subtly belies the text, or perhaps cheapens the whole thing by poor style or technique. The 'Dagon' illustration delighted me; for not only is it very good, but it carries out the conception of the story as though projected out of my own imagination. Thanks, too, for the favorable send-off in 'The Eyrie.' I hope, though, that Messrs. Starrett and Sterling won't start gunning for me because of the allusions I made in those letters! It so happens that I have a particular respect for both of these gentlemen in their respective provinces! Starrett is practically the American introducer of my revered idol Machen, whilst Sterling upholds almost single-handed the sane tradition in American poetry.

"Assuming that your readers don't hand me a 'razz' which discourages future contributions, I am sending along a third story to follow 'The P. in the H.' This is one of those you had before in single-spaced form, now neatly re-typed by a gifted young man whose acquaintance I have lately made, and who tells me he has had considerable correspondence with you.

"I haven't fully read the October WEIRD TALES, but I think it is going to prove a very attractive issue, judging from 'The Phantom Farmhouse,' by Seabury Quinn, which I liked exceedingly. There is a maturity to this tale which seems annoyingly absent from much popular magazine fiction. I like the idea of reprinting old weird classics—it is surprising to discover how many persons have failed to read certain noted standbys. I have many such lacunae—for example, I have never read F. Marion Crawford's 'Upper Berth,' which you are about to use, much to my gratification.

"Every once in a while I discover some weird masterpiece by an author either wholly unknown or unknown in America, which I wish could be popularized. Just now I am enthusiastic about a tale called 'The House of Sounds,' by M. P. Shiel, which occurs in a book of short stories named after the first one, 'The Pale Ape,' and published by T. Werner Laurie, Clifford's Inn, London. This is the most haunting thing I have read in a decade—a creeping horror and menace trickling down the centuries on a sub-Arctic island off the coast of Norway, where, amidst the sweep of daemon winds and the ceaseless din of hellish waves and cataracts, a vengeful dead man built a brazen tower of terror. It is vaguely like—yet infinitely unlike—'The Fall of the House of Usher.' I wish there were a way of getting republication rights from the publisher—for it would surely be a sensation in WEIRD TALES."

WE like to read letters that mix criticism with flattery—thus:

"Dear Mr. Baird: Just a few lines to let you know I am delighted with WEIRD TALES. I have read every number except the July-August issue. Find enclosed two-bits for which please send me that number at once. Please keep W. T. weird, cutting out all commonplace fiction, and do not reprint a lot of old stuff which is already old stuff to your readers. Put W. T. back to its original size; it is too bulky and unhandy in its present shape. Please cut out so-called weird tales by A. Rud. They were never intended for WEIRD TALES. There should be a certain time each month for W. T. to appear on the news stands. 'Dagon' by Lovecraft was good. Give us some more of his stuff. Put the index back in front where it belongs. I have been a W. T. booster from the start, having induced several friends to read your hair-raising magazine.—Fred T. Norris, 412 East Thirteenth Street, Huntington, West Virginia."

Or like this:

"Dear Mr. Baird: I have followed WEIRD TALES with interest from the beginning. It has broken ground in a new field, so far as our periodicals are concerned, and one in which I personally have always taken an extreme interest. The unwise conservatism of our magazine editors in scornfully rejecting tales of horror, no matter how artistically presented, is being demonstrated by the success of your venture, which will, I trust, increase in magnitude.

"My voice is given for a continuation of the reprinted tales, which have formed so important a phase of English and American fiction. 'The House and the Brain,' 'The Turn of the Screw,' and other classics, should not be forgotten by the readers of the present day. I am inclined to believe that a series of articles on the weird fiction of the past, taking up and digesting the notable novels of this type, from 'The Monk' to 'Dracula' (this last being in my opinion the best novel of the kind yet written) would be of no small interest. My studies have led me rather far into this field.

"Please accept my congratulations on

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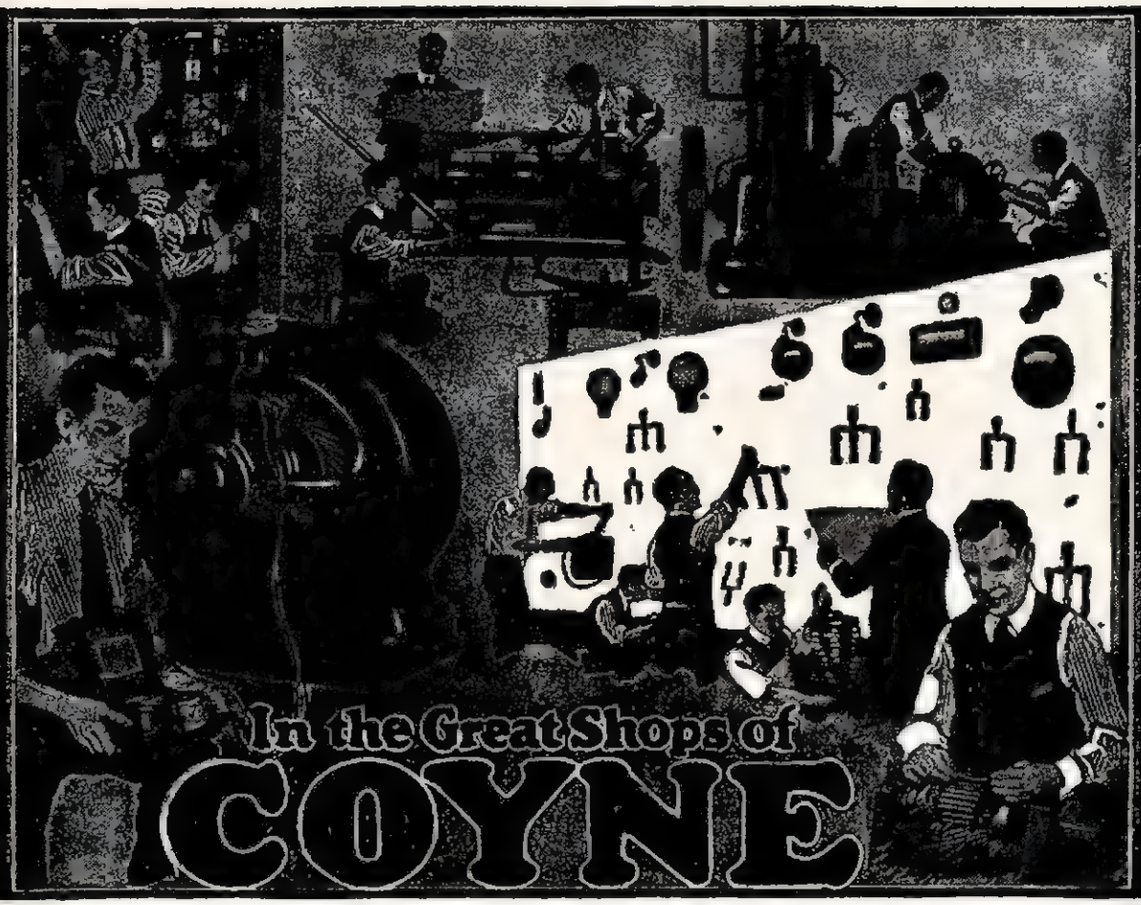

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the publication of 'Dagon.' I am among the friends of Mr. Lovecraft, who have recognized his extraordinary talents in the class of literary work, and I think I was the first to urge him to submit some of it to you. Having read a number of his manuscripts, I know the treat in store for your readers. His stories have a stamp of their own, utterly beyond the compass of the ordinary writer of horror tales. Some of them, I think, will prove to have a permanent place in the best remembered production of our American literature.

"Not to deal out undiscriminating laudation, I find some weak spots in the stories of certain of your writers. They are obviously dealing with an unfamiliar medium, and must be expected to slip now and then. This is the more reason for perseverance on your part, since it is only a question of time when a school of writers will be developed, who will be thorough masters of the technique of this interesting branch of fiction. The detective story has undergone an evolution from the extreme crudities of early dabblers to the admirable crime mystery tales of today; and the horror tales may be expected, under your able guidance, to do the same.

"Taking only the October issue, 'The People of the Comet' is on the whole so extremely fine a piece of work that the puerility of the thumb motif is especially annoying. It is the one blemish, but a very serious one. The author of 'The Phantom Farmhouse' has his superstitions mixed, and has fused or confused the werewolf and the vampire themes. At the same time, the story is particularly well conceived and written. In 'The Amazing Adventure of Joe Scranton,' two aviators are represented as holding converse while in the air. This is an absolute impossibility, since the noise of the motor utterly forbids it. 'The Hairy Monster' would be effective, were it not the exact parallel of a story in a former issue, save for the unconvincing and illogical grotesquerie of the suicide of the spider. In the former case, a lizard or something similar was developed into the proportions of a dragon, and fed on raw meat; while this one is a spider, fed on blood; but the theme is identical. 'An Adventure in the Fourth Dimension' is rather trivial.

"On the other hand, the issue has some extremely excellent contents. In addition to 'Dagon,' there is that admirable story, 'Devil Manor,' which could not well be improved, and is one of the best things you have yet given us. 'The Case of the Golden Lily' is more of the detective than the weird order, but is perfect of its kind. 'Grey Sleep,' 'After the Storm' and 'The Inn

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DIVING deeper into our mail, we come up with an interesting assortment of letters; and right here seems a good place to print them:

"Dear Editor: I found your two magazines the second month, and have bought all I could find since. I am not going to offer any criticism, but will say that if you printed twenty magazines of the kind each month, instead of two, I should buy them all and wish for more. Is it necessary to say more?" [No; quite unnecessary.—Ed.] "I am compelled to spend a quiet life, so that reading and writing are my chief pleasures. Your magazines have given me thrills that I have not had since childhood. I like your Eyrie. It provides a personal touch between the writers and readers and yourself. I read it first, and, like a highball before dinner, it whets my appetite for the good things to come.—R. B. D., 115 South River Drive, Miami, Fla."

"Dear Sir: I have read two issues of WEIRD TALES and the latest one of DETECTIVE TALES. As a whole, I think they're good—though the former, I believe, will prove to be more popular. The large-size appearance is more attractive, I think, than the small size. Easier to read and handle.—Joseph Faus."

"Dear Sir: Permit me to compliment you on the wonderful magazine you are editing. In my days I have read many mystery stories, but I must confess that the tales contained in your book are not only unique, but also very interesting and enjoyable. I am only one of the many thousands who look forward to reading WEIRD TALES every month.—D. E. N., Milwaukee."

"Dear Mr. Baird: You have a wonderful magazine in WEIRD TALES, and I can but wish you every success in your unusual venture. I enjoy all the stories, and I know the difficulty that confronts you in obtaining your material, for writers must break away from the conventional school if they are to submit stories that answer your requirements.—T. R. H., Frazier Mountain Camp, Cal."

"Dear Sir: You will, perhaps, recall that I have written you before. Before making a suggestion I wish to say that I enjoy WEIRD TALES more than ever and have induced a number of my friends to become newsstand subscribers. I especially read with pleasure the scientific sort of tale. 'The Grey Death' was one, and 'The People of the Comet' was superb. Now allow me to make a suggestion: If weird tales, why not weird poetry? Surely there must be some excellent poems of the creepy sort. —Edward Schultz, 335 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo."

There are. And, acting on Mr. Schultz's suggestion, we've begun us-

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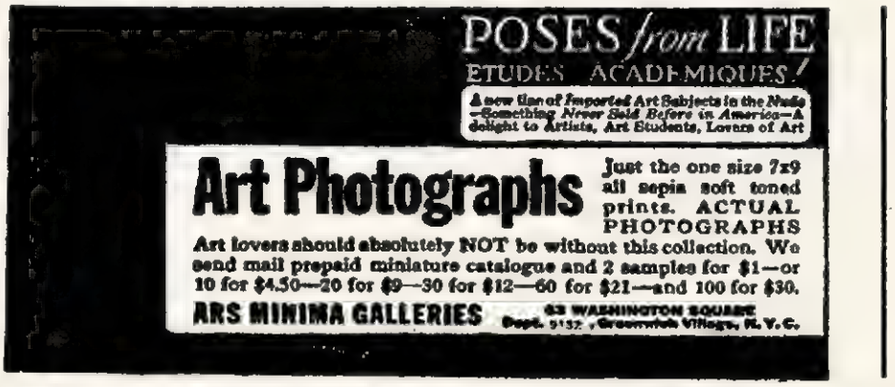
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ing poetry in WEIRD TALES. We shall continue to use it—as long as we can find poetry that is sufficiently weird.

WE have a letter here from G. Peyton Wertenbaker of Wilmington, Delaware, that is typical of dozens we have received. Until the advent of WEIRD TALES, those who liked strange and uncanny fiction could find what they wanted only among the classics; but now WEIRD TALES is getting well established—and the classics can go on gathering dust.

Here is Mr. Wertenbaker's letter:

"My dear Sir: Ever since I can remember I have reveled in fantastic and horrible stories. Not the cheap things that are sold usually as 'mystery' or 'detective' stories, but the real tales that seem to grip your heart in a clutch of cold terror, the kind of tale that seems to leave you tottering on the brink of sanity. Possibly this is abnormal in me: I do not know. But I have always read these tales, by Poe, de Maupassant, Arthur Machen, Wells, Algernon Blackwood, and all the rest.

"Until very recently I had never found a magazine that published such tales; and then, thank God, I discovered WEIRD TALES. Hereafter it will supply the one need in my literary make-up.

"I want to call your attention to a rather curious coincidence. In the September issue of WEIRD TALES begins a romance by Austin Hall, entitled, 'The People of the Comet.' I am a very eager student of astronomy, so I naturally read his story first of all. You may imagine my surprise when I discovered that the idea that plays the most important part in it is one which I myself developed somewhat differently in a story about a month earlier. If you will consult Science and Invention, August, 1923, you will see my own tale 'The Man From The Atom.' Mr. Hall may possibly be interested in comparing it with his romance."

Equally interesting is the following communication from Rev. Henry S. Whitehead, M. A., of Trinity Church House, Bridgeport, Conn., himself a writer of note:

"Dear Sir: You may be familiar with my work which has been published in numerous magazines here and in England since 1905. . . . It is very interesting to me to have seen WEIRD TALES for the first time today. I have long contended that such a magazine would go well, and I think I can see something of your internal problems—the necessary balance between the kind of work Arthur Machen and Montague James are turning out in this field in England and that which will not be caviare to the newsstand. . . . I congratulate you on your courage in going ahead with WEIRD TALES. It should, when well established, fill a real need, and no one has, apparently, dared to risk this type of publication."

A NUMBER of those who read "The Amazing Adventure of Joe Scranton" have asked us if "astralization is anything more than fiction," and since we weren't sure about this we submitted the question to Effie W. Fifield, who wrote the story. And here is her answer:

"Dear Mr. Baird: I would say that advanced occultists have long claimed that astralization was possible. But it is also dangerous. Not long ago I was told of a man who ruptured a blood-vessel in the brain while trying to astralize himself. One must be prepared by special training before attempting it. I would not give information that would lead anyone to experiment. One should receive instruction from a master—and such instruction is usually offered when one is ready to receive.

"As a beginning, I think your correspondents would be interested in reading two books by Franz Hartman, M. D. One is entitled 'Magic, White and Black,' and the other is 'The Life of Paracelsus.' These books were published in London, by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Their address used to be Paternoster House, Charing Cross Road."

We earnestly hope that none of these industrious theosophists visit us in astral form. THE EDITOR.

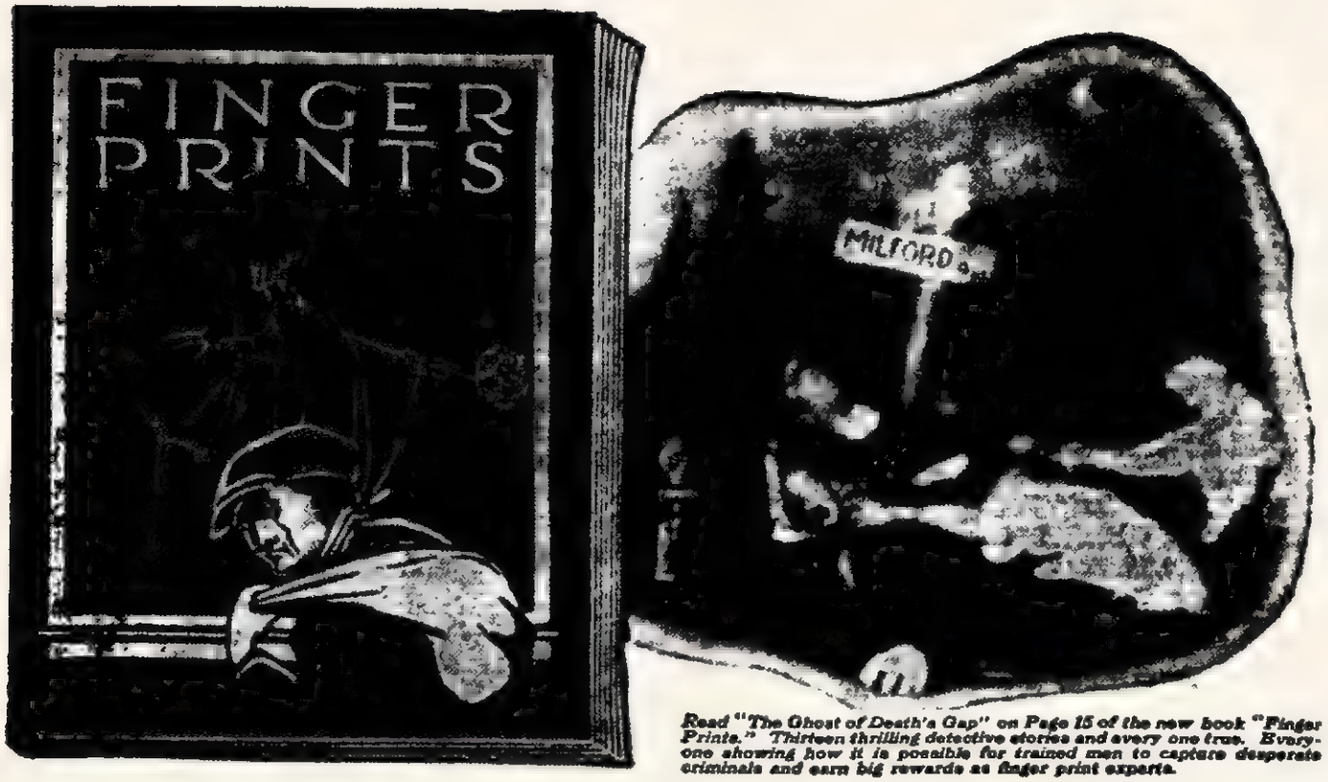
COMMITS SUICIDE AT FUNERAL

JOHN H. PLEASANTS, 40, walked into the chapel of an undertaking establishment in Los Angeles, while a service was being conducted and asked:

"Is this a funeral?"

"Yes," some one replied.

Pleasants then drew a pistol and shot himself in the head, dying an hour later. In his pocket was found a letter addressed, "Dear God and family," in which he said he could no longer endure ill health.



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An Unusual Storiette SNAKE

By GALEN C. COLIN

IT WAS Saturday afternoon, and the men of Mooreland County were gathered, as was their custom, on the porch of the postoffice at Clayton Springs. They were watching a man, who was a stranger to most of them, making his way toward them down the trail from the hills.

"It's Ben Tibbits," said Jem Bates. "He's the feller that came over the divide a month or two ago and built a cabin about ten miles up the trail. Don't know much about him, but what I do know is too much. He beats his wife." With that, he spat disgustedly on the porch floor.

As Ben Tibbits came nearer, a playful puppy, one of the pack that always followed Jean Parton, ran to meet him. With an oath, he gave the puppy a brutal kick that sent it sprawling ten feet away. In an instant Jean was on his feet and rushing at the stranger.

Instead of defending himself, Tibbits groveled at Jean's feet. He fairly writhed in fright; every movement, every expression, showed terror beyond control. With disgust Jean spurned him with his foot and walked back to the group of interested watchers.

"The cowardly Snake," was his only comment.

And "Snake" was his name from that time on to the men of these Western Mountains. Swart and low-browed he was, with long and gorilla-like arms. His eyes were small and beady, black and furtive. All the cunning and lack of conscience of a swamp moccasin were shown in his shifty glance. Trapping was ostensibly his occupation—rumor had it otherwise. Hundreds of Chinese were smuggled across the border. Much of this smuggling was attributed to Snake and the immigration officers were constantly watching him. He was never caught red-handed for he was too sly and patient; he made no move until he was absolutely safe.

A fiery temper had Snake. Physical cowardice—abject terror at thought of physical injury—made him hold his temper well in hand toward men. The incident at his first visit to Clayton Springs was his only display. Toward his wife he gave it full sway. Never was her face and body free from the marks of his beatings; and his blows and insults had left her spiritless.

Dorothy Tibbits was frail and flaxen haired—always tired-looking. Still, after six years as the wife of Snake she showed more than a hint of her former beauty—loveliness that made her the belle of the home village in old York State, before she came West to be the wife of Snake. With the unaccountable heart of a woman, she loved Snake and endured his lashings of both tongue and fist.

Owning the idolatry of every man in Mooreland county, none dared say a word against Snake in her presence. They were not so reticent among themselves. Jem Bates voiced the opinion of all.

"That damned Snake!" he burst out one day. "If he ever accidentally nips his thumb when he takes a chaw of eatin' tobacco, all the booze in the state won't cure his pizen. He'll swell up and bust like a mosquito."

These neighbors, had they ever learned the details of Snake's demise, would have been the first to sense the poetic justice of it.

When building his trap-line cabin in a secluded ravine up the mountain-side, Snake built with true serpentine cunning. He labored alone. No one had seen him at work. No one knew that beneath the rough slab floor was a cellar some eight feet square and five feet deep. It was reached by a trap door, cleverly concealed beneath the bunk. The only light came through a narrow crack between the cabin wall and the ground.

"Some day," mused Snake as he dug, "I'll get sore and kill that whimperin' female. Then I'll need this hideout."

He glanced at a six-foot length of one-inch rope, coiled in a corner.

It was a drizzly, damp spring night when Snake realized that his foresight would prove of immediate worth. His wife had been more than usually docile. She endured his curses without remonstrance. This inflamed Snake's twisted brain. With maniacal fury he seized her about the throat and wrung her neck as the cook wrings the neck of a chicken. He carelessly flung her body into a corner.

Then, as realization of what he had done dawned, he made a pack of all the eatables in the house. Slinging it to his back, he started for his retreat. He did not know that the slamming door had overturned the lamp and fired the house.

The wind howled dismally through the trees. Wet branches, like dead hands, slapped Snake in the face. At

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times the scraping of boughs brought him up standing, so much like the groan of a stricken woman they sounded. It was with a somewhat shaky set of nerves that Snake pushed open the cabin door. Into the cellar Snake dragged a few blankets. His pack of provisions and two canteens of water followed. It was pitch dark. Not daring to strike a light, he spread the blankets and lay down to dream-troubled sleep.

His neighbors were on the trail sooner than he had expected. Attracted by the light from the burning cabin, Jean Parton was the first on the scene of the tragedy. He lived but half a mile down the valley and arrived in time to read the marks. Soon a dozen well-armed men were on the trail.

Knowing of Snake's mountain cabin, it was there that the hunt centered. A thorough search failed to reveal the well-concealed hiding place. On account of the intense darkness it was useless to search further that night. The man hunters bunked down in the cabin to snatch a few hours of sleep before dawn. It was their stirring that awakened Snake. Day was just breaking. For some moments he lay with his eyes closed, listening to the comments on the killing.

"Hangin' is too good for the dirty devil," growled Jem Bates. "Burnin' is better, but I vote for *slow* burnin', you bet."

"Bet he's lit out across the Divide," hazarded Jack Williams, veteran trailer. "We'll foller him clean to Californy. The Law will never git its hands on him."

Snake almost chuckled aloud as he slowly opened his eyes. Instantly he froze with horror. Not three feet in front of his face was a sinister and menacing coil. Quickly he closed his eyes for a few seconds. It was no dream—the coil was there.

He could almost see the quiver of a sinuous body about to strike. It seemed he could feel the pair of jet black, glistening eyes glaring into his own. He could imagine deadly fangs fastened into his cheek. If he only dared draw his gun and blow off the reptile's head. That would bring more enemies more deadly about him. If only the men above would leave before some inadvertent movement drew that attack.

Then stark terror took him. Now the reptile breathed twin jets of fire. Now it grinned at him in hideous fashion. Again it grew—and grew—until it almost crowded him from the cellar. It disappeared for a second. Then the blessed relief was broken by finding it more menacing than ever in another corner.

Through it all, Snake uttered no word. At

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length, with hypnotic power, the eyes drew him. He gently rolled onto his stomach. He began to wriggle toward the thing. Could he grasp it by its slimy throat and choke it before it struck? That was his only chance. He would rather die from the poisonous fangs than lie there trembling and chilling with terror.

He moved cautiously, stealthily; his fear-filled eyes dimmed and glowed alternately. Was the reptile moving toward him, or merely lying in wait, biding its time before it struck?

He was close enough now to grasp it. Slowly he raised his hand—he slipped—his face fell forward into the very center of the coil as his hand closed about the slimy throat.

Then it was over.

Many days were consumed in the search for the murderer. At length the disappointed men returned empty-handed. In time the story of the crime was almost forgotten.

But to this day, in a cellar beneath a rough slab floor, in a far-away mountain ravine, lies a moldering skeleton. Its long, bony fingers are clutched tightly around the end of a six-foot strand of slimy rope.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912.

Of Weird Tales, published monthly at Indianapolis, Indiana. For October 1st, 1923.

State of Illinois } ss.
County of Cook }

Before me, a notary public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared J. C. Henneberger, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the business manager of the Weird Tales, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to-wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher—Rural Publishing Corporation, 326 N. Capitol Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

Editor—Edwin Baird, 1721 Boomer Pl., Evanston, Ill.

Managing Editor—None.

Business Manager—J. C. Henneberger, 854 N. Clark St., Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owner is: (If the publication is owned by an individual his name and address, or if owned by more than one individual the name and address of each, should be given below; if the publication is owned by a corporation the name of the corporation and the names and addresses of the stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of the total amount of stock should be given.) E. A. Peterson, 32 E. Georgia St., Indianapolis, Ind.; W. R. Sprenger, 854 N. Clark St., Chicago, Ill.; J. C. Henneberger, 854 N. Clark St., Chicago, Ill.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is ——— (This information is required from daily publications only.)

Signature, business manager,
J. C. HENNEBERGER.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1923.

(SEAL) JOSEPH A. SACCONE, Notary Public.
My commission expires Jan. 31, 1926.

THE BLACK CAT

(Continued from page 84)

Some few inquiries had been made, but these had been readily answered. Even a search had been instituted—but of course nothing was to be discovered. I looked upon my future felicity as secured.

Upon the fourth day of the assassination, a party of the police came, very unexpectedly, into the house, and proceeded again to make rigorous investigation of the premises. Secure, however, in the inscrutability of my place of concealment, I felt no embarrassment whatever. The officers bade me accompany them in their search. They left no nook or corner unexplored. At length, for the third or fourth time, they descended into the cellar. I quivered not in a muscle. My heart beat calmly as that of one who slumbers in innocence. I walked the cellar from end to end. I folded my arms upon my bosom, and roamed easily to and fro. The police were thoroughly satisfied and prepared to depart. The glee at my heart was too strong to be restrained. I burned to say if but one word, by way of triumph, and to render doubly sure their assurance of my guiltlessness.

"Gentlemen," I said at last, as the party ascended the steps, "I delight to have allayed your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By the bye, gentlemen, this—this is a very well constructed house." [In the rabid desire to say something easily, I scarcely knew what I uttered at all.]—"I may say an *excellently* well constructed house. These walls—are you going, gentlemen?—these walls are solidly put together;" and here, through the mere phrenzy of bravado, I rapped heavily, with a cane which I held in my hand, upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom.

But may God shield and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-Fiend! No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb!—by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman—a howl—a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

Of my own thoughts it is folly to speak. Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next, a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!

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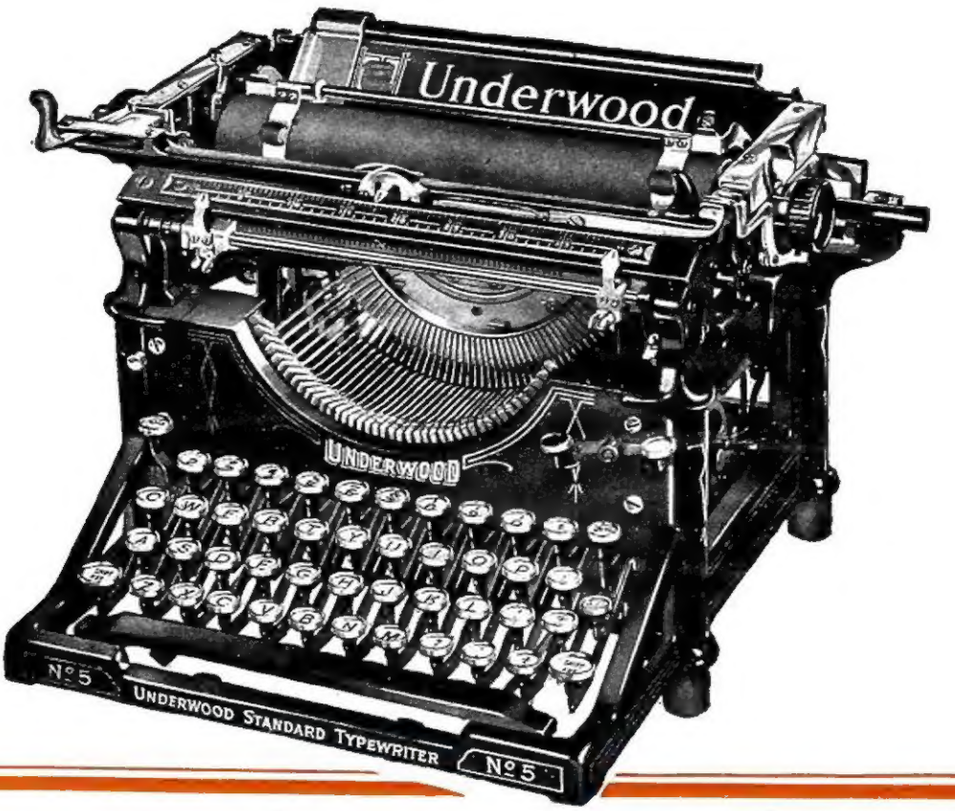

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